OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro* GAMER™

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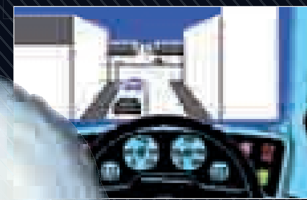
STREETS OF RAGE

FROM CLASSIC BRAWLER TO BLISTERING REMAKE

THE MAKING OF...

TURBO ESPRIT

MIKE RICHARDSON FIRES UP HIS LOTUS ESPRIT FOR A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE



10th Anniversary Special

Castlevania

DISCOVER THE MACABRE SECRETS OF KONAMI'S SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

MELBOURNE HOUSE

BEHIND THE SCENES OF AUSTRALIA'S BIGGEST SUCCESS STORY

A TRIBUTE TO

KEITH CAMPBELL

RETRO GAMER PAYS ITS RESPECTS TO ONE OF GAMING'S GREATEST ADVENTURERS

THE MAKING OF...

PITFALL!

DAVID CRANE TALKS CROCS, LOGS AND PITFALL HARRY



BARGAIN HUNT

EVERY GAMES MACHINE LISTED

WANT TO START COLLECTING VINTAGE HARDWARE? CHECK OUT OUR COMPLETE LISTING

FEATURED THIS MONTH IN RETRO GAMER

BANJO KAZOOIE
HOW RARE NEARLY BEAT NINTENDO AT ITS OWN GAME

WONDERSWAN
DISCOVER BANDAI'S MUCH MALIGNED HANDHELD

CRYSTAL CASTLES
FIND OUT HOW TO ROLL YOUR WAY INTO THE RECORD BOOKS

ARMALYTE
REDISCOVERING THALAMUS' EXCELLENT SHOOT-'EM-UP

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE GAME BOX ART



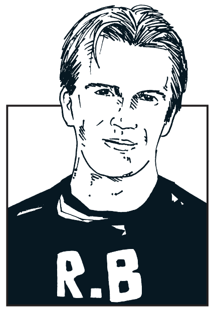
MIKE TOOLEY

My favourite box art has to be Ultimate's *Underwurlde*. It marked the return of Sabreman with a font that only Ultimate could have created straddling the iconic black box – as I walked home it felt like the Grail to me.
Expertise: Finding top secret company stuff by accident on the internet
Currently playing:
Quake 4
Favourite game of all time:
Phantasy Star Universe



DAVID CROOKES

The art for *Super Mario Bros 2* was cool. With a simple picture of the plumber, it heralded his return. It was the start of a new adventure and I loved it.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Super Mario 64
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



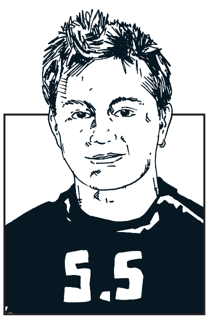
RICHARD BURTON

Manic Miner (Software Projects) – instantly recognisable, almost iconic artwork by Roger Tissyman. My first game, my favourite game and a warm nostalgic glow whenever I see a green mutant telephone!
Expertise:
Spectrum and Amstrad gaming.
Currently playing:
Red Moon (Spectrum)
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



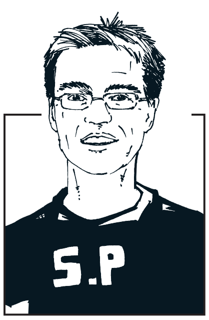
ANDREW FISHER

The Sentinel – an abstract image capturing the heart of what the game is all about.
Expertise: My *Mastermind* specialist subject would be the Commodore 64
Currently playing:
Burnout Revenge
Favourite game of all time:
The Sentinel



SPANNER

It Came From The Desert and *Rocket Ranger* both oozed pulp fiction and grabbed you by the eyeballs. You knew instantly what the game was going to be like from those boxes.
Expertise:
Art and its cultural relevance
Currently playing:
Tony Hawk's Project 8
Favourite game of all time:
Streets Of Rage 2



SIMON PHILLIPS

Head Over Heels obviously. Bob Wakelin's excellent artwork perfectly captures the wacky spirit of the game.
Expertise:
Juggling babies and work
Currently playing:
Crackdown
(not with Darran though)
Favourite game of all time:
Head Over Heels



MARTYN CARROLL

All of Bob Wakelin's Ocean stuff is ridiculously good, although *Hunchback II* is my favourite. It's got a bit of everything – death-defying action, bloodthirsty bats, top-heavy wenches and even some great balls of fire. If only the game itself was as swinging.
Expertise: Games in which you could redefine the keys
Currently playing:
Crazy Cars 3 (Amiga)



PAUL DRURY

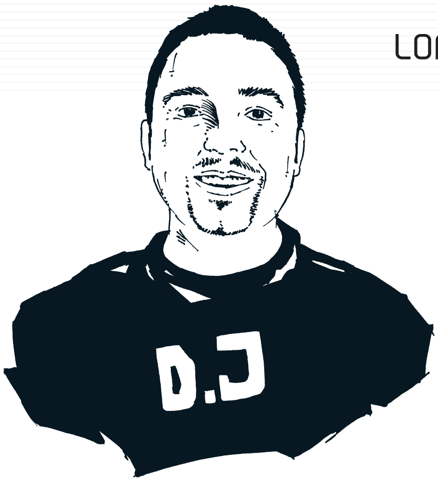
Adventure on the VCS. The Puff The Magic Dragon pastiche fills me with this overwhelming sense of lost innocence and soon I'm weeping onto the wood grain.
Expertise: Getting programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
GoldenEye
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



CRAIG GRANNELL

I don't like the game much, but the Last Ninja box art is a great example of a simple concept well executed. Well, apart from the weird bug eyes.
Expertise: Games whose controllers don't require you to have 37 fingers
Currently playing:
Tempest 2000
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.

LOADING...



Listen carefully. Can you hear it? To quote the *Matrix*'s Agent Smith 'It's the sound of inevitability.' "But what does this mean?" I hear you ask. Worry not, for like a hormonal teenager, Retro Gamer will be going through a few changes over the next few months. The magazine you now hold in your hands is Imagine's 18th (the same number of issues that Live Publishing managed) and if truth were told, it could do with a change.

We're not going to make Retro Gamer completely unrecognisable, but we are going to make sure that it becomes a magazine that everyone can enjoy. There's already a huge debate happening on our forums (www.retrogamer.net/forum) and we'd love you to join in, so if you haven't already, sign up and tell us your views and what you'd like to see in future issues.

In the meantime it's business as usual and this month features some fantastic content to sink your teeth into. Rare and Konami talk to us about *Banjo Kazooie* and *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*, classic 8-bit hits *Turbo Esprit* and *Armalyte* are fully exposed, and we go behind the scenes of both the Sega Technical Institute and Melbourne House.

Enjoy the magazine.





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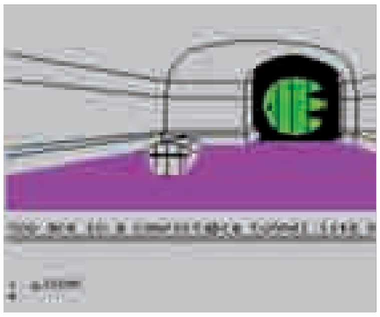
110 **CLASSIFIEDS**



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THE MAKING OF…
BANJO KAZOOIE
IN AN EXCLUSIVE NEW INTERVIEW, RETRO GAMER TALKS TO RARE ABOUT ONE OF ITS GREATEST PLATFORMERS







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SEGA TECHNICAL INSTITUTE
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48 IT'S BEEN HAILED AS THE GREATEST *CASTLEVANIA* GAME OF ALL TIME, SO WE WERE DELIGHTED WHEN ASSISTANT DIRECTOR KOJI IGARASHI REVEALED TO US THE SECRETS OF *SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT*.



RETRORATED



THE GAMES LISTING...

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it

88 DOUBLE DRAGON

88 JETPAC REFUELLED

88 ALIEN HOMINID HD

88 DOOM

88 ASSAULT HEROES

89 DIG DUG

89 MS. PAC-MAN

89 PAPERBOY

89 HEAVY WEAPON

89 WORMS

90 CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT



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Can't stand the thought of missing the next marvellous edition of Retro Gamer? Then simply head on over to our subscriptions pages and place your order now!

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THE MAKING OF...

PITFALL!

62 Pitfall Harry is a platform hero, so imagine our delight when its creator, David Crane, swung by for a chat.



RETROINSPECTION

WONDERSWAN

68 It may not have been released in the UK, but that doesn't mean you should ignore Bandai's cute handheld.



THE MAKING OF...

TURBO ESPRIT

84 Mike Richardson once again gets behind the wheel of a Lotus and recalls the creation of his classic 8-bit hit.

RETRORADAR

THE GUIDE

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THANKYOU FOR THE MUSIC

LEGENDARY GAMES COMPOSER PASSES AWAY



Richard's excellent tunes helped define the Amiga's music scene. He will be sadly missed. (image courtesy of remix64)

It's with great distress that we announce the sudden passing away of Richard Joseph, aged 53, after a brief battle with lung cancer.

Well known throughout the videogames industry thanks to his superb work on the likes of *Barbarian*, *Cannon Fodder* and *The Chaos Engine*, Richard had been involved with several, high-profile companies and will be greatly missed by anyone who has had the pleasure of listening to his superb scores.

Although Richard was initially contracted to EMI as a signed recording artist, it wasn't long until he felt the call of videogames and he soon found himself working at Palace Software. *Barbarian*, *The Sacred Armour Of Antiriad* and *Cauldron II: The Pumpkin Strikes Back*, were just a few of the games he was involved in and gamers quickly warmed to his toe-tapping, catchy tunes.

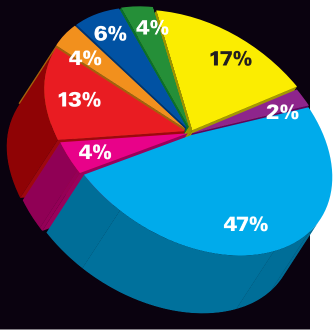
Despite creating some fine work on machines like the Commodore 64, Richard's profile was arguably raised once he moved over to the 16-bit machines and teamed up with first Jon Hare at Sensible Software, and later the Bitmap Brothers. Working on everything from *Cannon Fodder*, to *Speedball 2* and *The Chaos Engine*, Joseph's work was instantly recognisable and he eventually went on to win a BAFTA for his work on Electronic Arts' *Theme Park World*. A grizzled veteran of the industry, Richard's last project was *Evil Genius*, by Elixir Studios, of which he was audio director.

We were lucky enough to meet up with Richard at 2005's Retro Ball and you couldn't have wished to meet a more pleasant individual with a true passion for games, both past and present. Our thoughts are now with his close friends and family.

HOT TOPICS

FAVOURITE RETRO GAMER FEATURE

Back to the 80s **17%**
The Making of **47%**
Desert Island Disks **13%**
Developer Lookback **6%**
Company Profile **4%**
Full of Eastern Promise **4%**
Home-Brew Section **2%**
Retroinspection **4%**



SLAY ONE. GET TWO FREE

NEW CASTLEVANIA TITLE TO FEATURE TWO CLASSIC GAMES

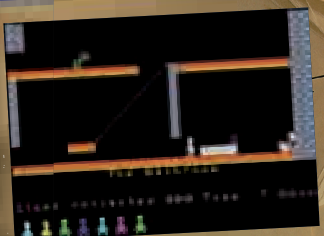
You've got to hand it to the folks at Konami. Not content with giving us the marvellous *Symphony Of The Night* for Xbox Live Arcade (read our thoughts on page 90) it's also announced a brand new title for the PSP.

Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles is a brand new enhanced update of the PC Engine's superb *Castlevania: Rondo Of Blood* and is due for release at the end of the year. While *The Dracula X Chronicles* uses a similar graphical styling to Capcom's recent *Ghost 'N' Goblins* tribute and looks set to be another rollicking whip-cracking adventure, it's the special features Konami is including that's really exciting us. Not only will you have access to a perfect port of the original *Rondo Of Blood* (which regularly sells for over £80) Konami is also adding *Symphony Of The Night* as well! Needless to say, this impressive sounding UMD has already leapt straight to the top of our most wanted list.



A brand new update of *Rondo Of Blood* on the PSP? How can it possibly fail?

HERO OF THE MONTH



MINER WILLY

Every month, Retro Gamer looks at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of Matthew Smith's Miner Willy

First appearance: *Manic Miner*

Distinguishing features: Dapper top hat

Weapon of choice: If only

Most likely to: Get squashed by a giant foot

Least likely to: Appear in The Megatree

Unusual fact: Eugene Evans of 'Eugene's Lair' fame now works at EA Mythic

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 18: SLAP FIGHT



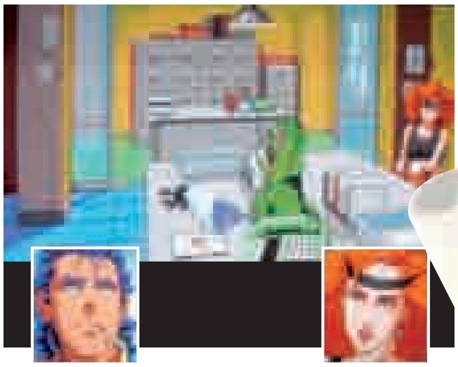
Shoot-'em-ups need to be exciting if they're to capture their target audience and Probe's loading screen of Taito's *Slap Fight* was no exception. Bold and bright and filled with laser fire and explosions it gave a good example of what was to come once the game had finally loaded. If only the in-game visuals had been as colourful.

JUST IN JUST AS WE WERE GOING TO PRESS A NEW GAME BY JONATHAN CAULDWELL POPPED THROUGH OUR LETTERBOX. EXPECT A FULL REVIEW OF IT NEXT ISSUE.

CALL THE COPS

KOJIMA'S POLICENAUTS FINALLY RECEIVES AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

When our recently-departed writer (to a new job, he's not dead), John Szczepaniak, covered Hideo Kojima's wonderful *Policenauts*, readers wrote in, in their droves, to complain that the game was inaccessible due to the sheer amount of Japanese text it featured.



Hopefully *Policenauts* story makes more sense than the bonkers *Metal Gear Solid 2*.

Well fear no longer dear readers, as thanks to those talented beavers – no, they're not really beavers that would be silly –at Junker's HQ, a fully-functional English patch of this Japanese classic has finally been completed. The catch. It's only currently available for the PlayStation and it's still going to be a few months before the newly re-launched Policenauts.net has ironed out the few technical issues it has.

Nevertheless, this is a great announcement and proves once again just how dedicated Kojima's fans actually are. You can find more information at www.policenauts.net/english. Otherwise, we suggest that you might like to learn to read Japanese. It's always best to learn it whilst living amongst its native speakers, so we suggest that you get a flight over and stay illegally for several months until you can appreciate *Policenauts* in its original form.

GETTING STICK

NEW JOYSTICK REVEALED FOR XBOX LIVE ARCADE

Take a good look at that flimsy shaft, displayed in motion using some rather funky Photoshop skills. How on earth are you supposed to play *Street Fighter II Hyper Fightin'* and not smash it into tiny plastic pieces? Despite our initial concerns over the durability of Madcatz's new gaming peripheral, we're sure it's going to be more than sturdy enough for the vast majority of titles that are currently available on Xbox Live Arcade – and it even comes with full versions of *Frogger*, *Time Pilot* and *Astropop*, which is a definite bonus.

However, for more intense titles we're definitely not convinced about the strength of the main stick. There's no news of a UK release yet, but at least the included spinner should make some of the classic Atari games that have been recently announced easier to play. More news as and when we get it. Hopefully we'll even get to playtest it.



It's no *Dead Or Alive 4* stick, but at least it should make *Pac-Man* easier to play.

VOYAGER LAUNCHES

VIDEOGAME ENTREPRENEUR JONATHAN THOMPSON INITIATES NEW RETRO COMPETITION

If you're an avid bedroom coder with dreams of stardom then you may well be interested in Jonathan Thompson's new project.



Jonathan Thompson (right) poses with Clint Boon in front of one of his Voyager cabinets.

Dubbed Voyager Crusade, Thompson has created a competition that will allow talented individuals to bring their coding skills to the forefront, with the opportunity of getting their creation published by Thompson if it wins. Thompson certainly has high hopes for the competition: "We're really hoping that entrants are going to reinvent the wheel… or at least the videogame," laughs Thompson, who got the idea after talking to Patrick Trollope, whose online newspaper covers a yearly event called 'Search for a Star'. "I had the idea that this would be a good way of getting people back into thinking "simple" and "playability" more than graphics. We worked on the idea and the Crusade was developed from that.

Recently launched at Liverpool's FAB café, the competition has already received plenty of interest and is open to all students and programmers over the age of 18. Anyone in the world can enter and Thompson is hoping to see some really special creations.

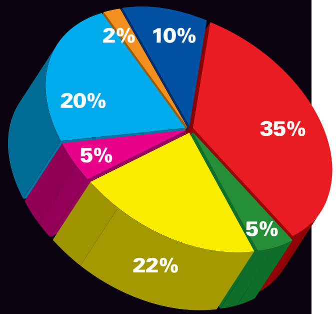
"We are after new ideas, that are based on the old ideas and styles of games: classic titles like *Pac-Man*, *Space Invaders* and *Tank Wars*," continues Thompson. "We're also looking for those programmers that consider options that grant equal accesses for disabled players, through to the normal ideas of original gameplay and story lines".

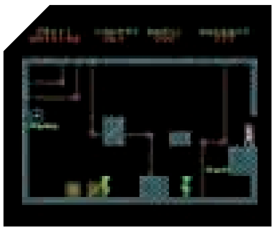
More information can be found at www.jt-voyagercrusade.com.

HOT TOPICS

BEST RETRO SUPPORTER

Microsoft **10%**
Nintendo **20%**
Sega **22%**
Capcom **35%**
SNK **2%**
Sony **5%**
Midway **5%**





MORE BUDGET GOODNESS ON THE WAY FROM CRONOSOFT

CRONO CRAZY

It's always nice when the latest Cronosoft titles drop through our letterbox, and this month we've had a deluge of new games.

Izzy Wizzy is a brand new Spectrum game from home-brew legend Jonathan Cauldwell. Priced at a reasonable £2.99 it's a solid little platformer that's bound to go down well with fans of Cauldwell's previous work.

Next up is *Balloonacy 2* for the Commodore 64. Created by Richard Bayliss, the aim of the game is to guide your balloon through some treacherously packed screens without bursting it. Not only does it come with the original game, 50 pence of each game sold will be donated to the RSPCA. And all this for just £2.99.

Cronosoft's third title is Ian Munro's *Iron Sphere* for the 48k Spectrum. A port of his popular CPC game, *Iron Sphere* is an engaging puzzler that requires you to collect as many diamonds as possible. The CPC version was a lot of fun and an early play suggests that the Spectrum outing is just as good. *Iron Sphere* is available now for £2.99.

Last, but by no means least is *Stranded* for the Commodore 64. Previously available on both the Amstrad CPC and Spectrum where we awarded it a solid 7/10, the Commodore 64 version has been coded by Bob Smith and can be snapped up for a mere £2.99.

CLASSIC ADVERTS TO STIMULATE THE NOSTALGIA GLAND

THE GALLERY



» *Mortal Kombat* USA 1992



» *OutRun* UK 1988



» *Bubble Bobble* Japan 1986



» Jet Set Willy UK 1984

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

RETRO REMAKE OF DAN DARE ON THE WAY



» A brand new update of Dan Dare? Yes please sir.

We're big fans of the *Dan Dare* 8-bit computer games, so imagine our pleasure when we found out that Trevor Storey (or Smila as he's known to our forum members) had revealed that he was working on a spanking new remake. While the game features improved visuals, "the characters have been updated a fair bit giving them more frames of animation," reveals Storey. "As far as the gameplay goes we're aiming to stick to the C64 version (my favourite) as closely as we can," he says, going on to add, "The only added features are a little intro and an alternative end sequence when you complete 100 per cent." Created by both Storey and Scott Watson, *Dan Dare* is currently two-thirds completed and should be available in the next few months.

IT'S A SIM

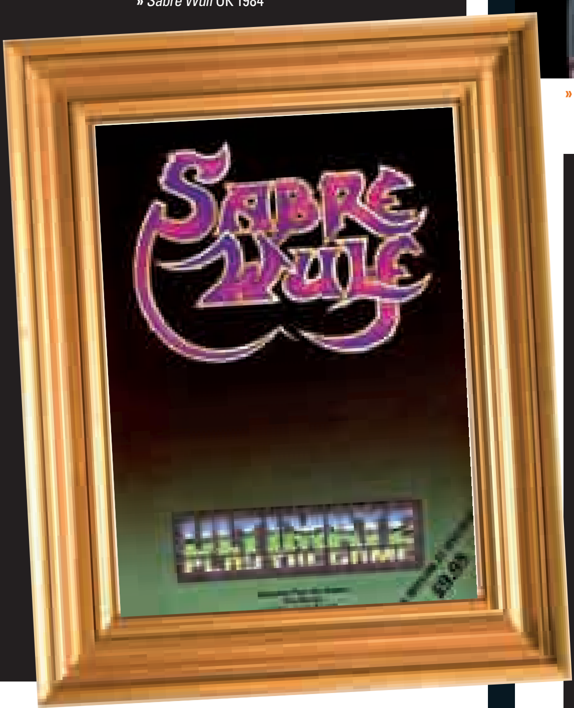
MORE DS GOODNESS FROM ELECTRONIC ARTS

Not content with announcing a new version of *Theme Park* for the Nintendo DS, Electronic Arts has also confirmed that the phenomenally popular *Sim City* is on the way as well.



» *Wizball* UK 1987

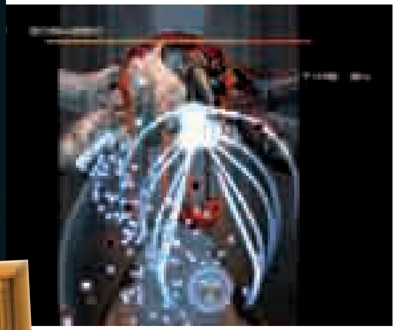
» *Sabre Wulf* UK 1984



COW-A-RUGA

IKARUGA AND TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES HEADING TO XBOX LIVE ARCADE

So there we were on Partnernet (Microsoft's online service for journalists) downloading Xbox Live Arcade games when we came across some impenetrable Japanese text. Intrigued by the Treasure logo that was attached, we downloaded the small file to find an option screen for the Japanese developer's *Ikaruga*. Marvellous.



» If *Ikaruga* doesn't appear in the UK we're going to be knocking on Treasure's door… with an axe.

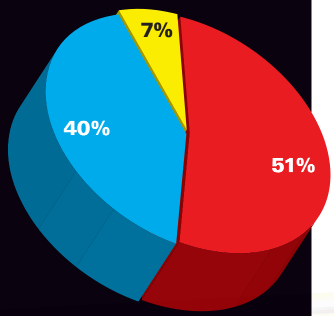
For those unaware, *Ikaruga* is the unofficial sequel to classic Saturn shmup *Radiant Silvergun* and was originally released on Sega's Dreamcast before finally appearing on Nintendo's GameCube. No news yet as to how this will be enhanced, or indeed if it will actually appear as a UK download, but at least it's an indication of Treasure's future plans for the service.

If that's not exciting enough, just as we were going to press, Ubisoft revealed that Digital Eclipse would be converting Konami's arcade hit *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. This in itself is very interesting as it effectively means that other licences we thought were once doomed could now make an appearance on the service as well.

HOT TOPICS

FAVOURITE VIDEOGAME ERA

Arcades **7%**
8-Bit **51%**
16-Bit **40%**



MORE CLASSIC MACHINES TO HIT THE Wii'S VIRTUAL CONSOLE

WII LOVE THE VC

Nintendo's Virtual Console appears to be the download service that just can't stop giving. Not content with allowing owners to download classic hits from the NES, SNES, N64, Mega Drive and PC Engine, Nintendo has recently revealed that MSX and Neo Geo titles will also be appearing on the service.

Despite not having a huge following in the UK, the MSX nevertheless proved to be a very popular machine and spawned several classic series, including both the *Metal Gear* and *Thunder Force* franchises. Nintendo has revealed that games will cost a rather steep 800 points – putting them in the same league as the far superior Mega Drive and SNES titles – and that the first two available games will be *Aleste* and *Eggy*.

Little is known about SNK and Nintendo's plans for the Neo Geo content as of yet, but we wouldn't be at all surprised if they end up selling for a hefty 1,000 points (the same price as N64 titles). Let's just hope we get games like *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, *Metal Slug* and *Blazing Star*, we'll end up saving a bloody fortune!



» Could Yumekobo's *Blazing Star* be heading to the Virtual Console? Let's hope so.

Sim City DS is currently available in Japan, although the extensive Japanese text means it's not worth importing. *Sim City* DS is due to reach our shores later this year. Electronic Arts hasn't revealed too much information, but we do know that you'll be able to blow into the DS's microphone to put out fires and that a variety of international landmarks will be available. Expect a review in a future issue.

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



SHREDDER

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH

Without a bad villain there would be no good heroes. What would Spider-Man be without the Green Goblin? What would Wolverine be without Sabertooth? Rubbish, that's what. This month: Shredder.

First Appearance: *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*

Distinguishing Features: Ominous metal facemask

Weapon of Choice: Razor-sharp katana

Most likely to: Try to disembowel a Ninja turtle

Least likely to: Go down the pub and reminisce about the good old days with Splinter

Unusual fact: Darran still knows all the lyrics to the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* theme song

RETRO GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

EVENT HOSTING RETRO GAMER

IF YOU WANT RETRO GAMER TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because Retro Gamer looks to the past that doesn't mean that there aren't games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing suitable games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



APRIL 07

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION VOL 2

Released: 20 April

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £19.99

Format: PS2, Xbox

Capcom has pushed back the release of its second PS2 compilation, but don't worry, it's definitely going to be worth the extra wait. *Tiger Road* may be the only new game – everything else has already appeared on Capcom's previous two PSP compilations – but we were too busy playing the brilliant remake of *Quiz & Dragons* to care.



APRIL 07

SNK VS CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS

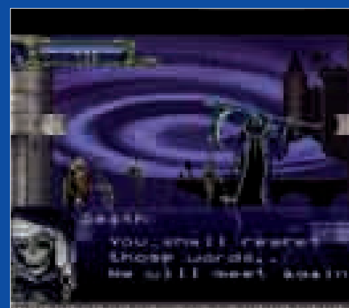
Released: 20 April

Publisher: Ignition

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

As great as the original Neo Geo Pocket version was, we're expecting the DS outing to be even better – mainly due to the fact that it will be fully controlled via the stylus. Early reports suggest that this version is trickier than the original, but we're confident SNK has been able to retain everything that made the Neo Geo Pocket version such fun to play.



APRIL 07

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

Released: April

Publisher: Konami

Price: 800 points

Format: Xbox Live Arcade

We've known it for the last ten years, but soon the vast majority of 360 owners will finally discover just how great *Symphony Of The Night* really is. Ported from the PlayStation by Digital Eclipse, *Symphony* is the finest *Castlevania* title you're ever likely to play. Quite simply one of Xbox Live Arcade's finest moments.



MAY 07

FINAL FANTASY III

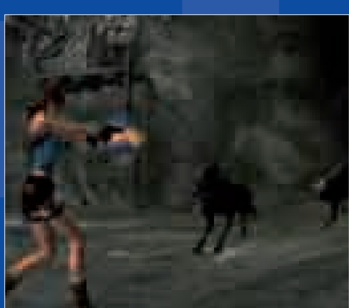
Released: 04 May

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Already a huge seller in both Japan and the US, Nintendo and Square Enix are no doubt hoping to achieve similar success in the UK. We've been playing the US version for a while now, and this great 3D update (the SNES version was only ever available in Japan) is everything we were hoping for and more. Expect a full review of the game in a future issue.



MAY 07

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

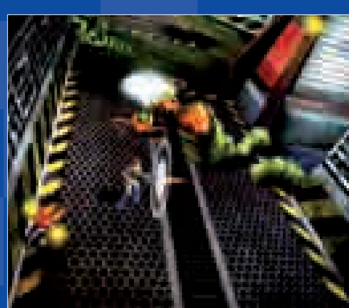
Released: 25 May

Publisher: Eidos

Price: £34.99

Format: PS2, PSP, PC

Now this is interesting. Obviously wanting to celebrate Lara Croft's tenth birthday in style, Eidos is going back to basics; it is releasing a re-jigged version of her first adventure. Sporting tasty new visuals, a variety of enhanced puzzles and boobs that now look actually real, *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* is bound to relight the nostalgic fires of anyone who owned the original game.



JULY 07

ALIEN SYNDROME

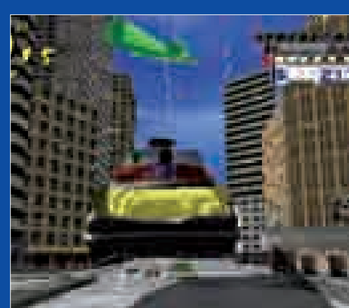
Released: July

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP, Wii

It may be one of Sega's more obscure coin-ops, but we're actually really looking forward to *Alien Syndrome*. While the original was essentially a sci-fi take on *Gauntlet*, the PS2 update that was released under the Sega Ages banner was a rip-roaring blaster that we still occasionally return to. Early reports, suggest that this new update will feature a similar blend of aliens, gunplay and slime. We can't wait.



JULY 07

CRAZY TAXI: FARE WARS

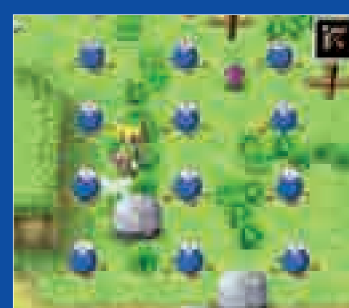
Released: July

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

Crazy Taxi was one of our favourite Dreamcast games, so it's great to see that it's being shrunken down to fit onto Sony's PSP. Featuring elements from both *Crazy Taxi* and its Dreamcast-only sequel, *Fare Wars* will be the first game in the franchise to offer a multiplayer mode and it is bound to be a huge hit with fans of the original. Will The Offspring return to feature on the soundtrack, though?



DECEMBER 07

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

Released: December

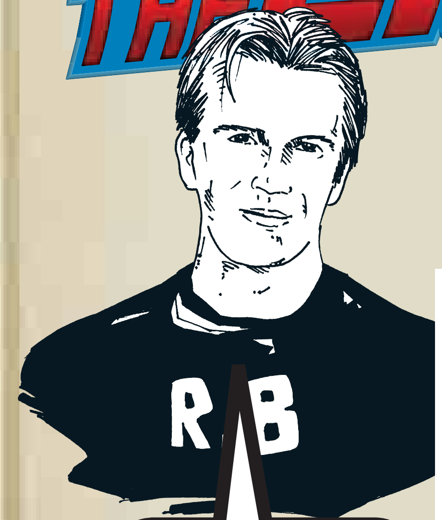
Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £29.99

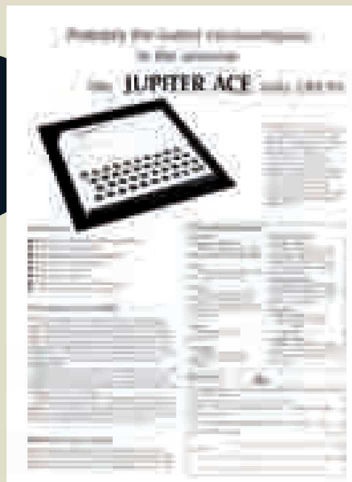
Format: DS

Aarrghh, one of our most anticipated DS titles has slipped to December '07. While *Phantom Hourglass* features a similar graphical style to *The Wind Waker*, it's set to make full use of the DS's unique abilities, allowing for some competitive play against another DS owner. With everything from Link's movement to combat being controlled by the stylus, this could well be the most unique *Zelda* yet.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM APRIL 1983



Sinclair passes a million, Gridrunner tops the pile, Atari gets miffed, Phoenix doesn't rise, Pac-Man gets 'board' and Hitler writes a book. Strap a Big Trak to each foot and give Stretch Armstrong a tug, we're off to April 1983. Richard Burton points the way

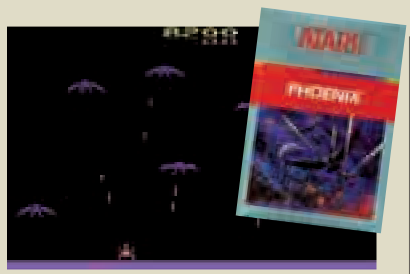


» The Jupiter Ace: the "fastest microcomputer in the universe." Feel the power of the 3K RAM. Top marks for trying though.

The ongoing case of games retailer Software Centre offering a "buy and try" scheme finally came to a conclusion.The shop had been running a scheme whereby any game purchased in the store could be returned within six months for an 80 per cent refund or discount off future purchases. After a spot of wrangling, legal jargon juggling and general one-upmanship, the buy-back period was reduced to a month. Although seen as a victory for the software producers, in reality it would have very little impact on the Software Centre's sales. Indeed, it announced expansion plans with news that it would be opening two new stores.

There was much chinking of champagne flutes at Sinclair Research as it released a statement declaring it was the first company to sell more than one million computers worldwide. It claimed that it had sold 130,000 ZX80s, 750,000 ZX81s and 200,000 Spectrum machines. Needless to say Commodore countered, claiming it had passed the million mark a few months previously.

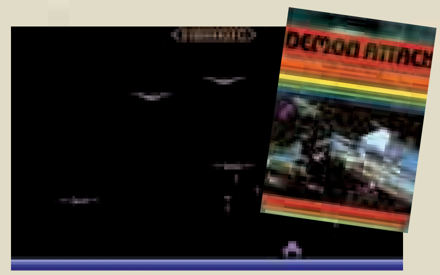
If Sinclair felt compelled to include the Timex 1000, the US version of the ZX81 that it had licensed to Timex, in its final figure, it would have significantly bumped up the total. The Timex 1000 and the mighty Apple II both had total US sales of 600,000 units sold while the market leader, Commodore's Vic-20, had sold 750,000 units.



» *Phoenix* (Atari 2600): Atari proclaimed, "don't buy that; buy this." Thousands of gamers listened and carried on playing *Demon Attack*.

Software gripes, gnashing of teeth and sour grapes aplenty came from software giant Atari. It was attempting to place an injunction on Imagic, a game developer for the Atari 2600, for daring to release a piece of software that looked a bit like one of its own games. Strangely, at this point, Atari hadn't even commercially released its game. Needless to say it was less than enthusiastic about the roaring trade Imagic was doing with its game *Demon Attack*. The game was a massive hit on both sides of the Atlantic even claiming Game Of The Year in 1982.

The problem Atari had with the *Phoenix* clone was just that… it was a clone of *Phoenix*. Atari itself had recently acquired the licence for *Phoenix* from Centuri to produce an official *Phoenix* game and, because of the hugely successful Imagic title, Atari was left filling its underpants and wondering whether there would be a market for its game by the time it eventually got released. Because of this, Atari wanted an injunction against Imagic to stop selling its game as, according to the Atari chairman, "With Atari's introduction of the authentic game, the presence of *Demon Attack* in the marketplace is confusing to the consumer."

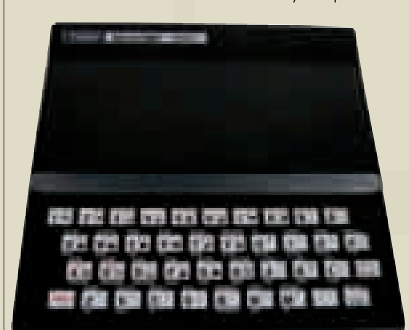


» *Demon Attack* (Atari 2600): Atari loathed it, gamers loved it. The *Phoenix* clone that gave Atari the right hump.

Alternatively, it could also mean that it prematurely thought the *Phoenix* end of the market was sewn up with its new official game. That was until it was usurped by a cheaper and, ultimately, better game which had been released way ahead of its own effort while all that time eating into its potential profits. With a record-breaking (as well as company-breaking) fee having been paid for the dire *ET – Extra Terrestrial* licence, was it any wonder Atari was financially arguing the toss about every lost dollar…

Not content with refusing to let other developers release games it also wanted an injunction thrown at Mattel for developing the Atari Expansion Module for its Colecovision console. The Module would allow Atari 2600 to be played on the system, and you won't be surprised to hear that Atari started stomping its feet once again.

Llamasoft founder Jeff Minter had plenty of reasons to celebrate with the news that company had the top-selling Vic-20 game… in America. *Gridrunner*, a



» It looks like a ZX81, it tastes like a ZX81, it is a ZX81 – with a Timex badge and just a hint of cheeseburger.



» The expansion module guaranteed to annoy the pants off computer gaming giants (particularly those with money problems).



» *Ah Diddums* (Spectrum): The mean, lean, stuffed-with-foam killing machine takes on the toy box in Imagine's newest game.

cartridge-based game, had sold over 15,000 copies in just a few months. Minter also revealed that he was working on a follow-up to *Gridrunner* entitled *Matrix*, which he hoped would be ready to release some time in May. On top of that he also had two new Llamasoft titles ready for release in the same month, *Rox 64* and *Attack Of The Mutant Camels*, both for Commodore 64.

Adverts started appearing in the computing press offering the opportunity to buy what was being advertised as "probably the fastest microcomputer in the universe." High praise indeed but what exactly could this dream machine be? Was this super computer Big Blue or a two-stroke Spectrum complete with steam-powered processor?

Turns out it was neither. The machine capable of being the fastest in the entire known universe was the Jupiter Ace. Like a whoopee cushion going off at a funeral, the advert brought stifled sniggers and barely controllable bladder function from many in the computing world. £90 would buy you the ultimate technological experience, offered only via mail order.

Quicksilva had a sudden surge of videogaming releases this month with no less than 14 titles across a range of different systems. This sudden over-abundance of software was due to advertisements Quicksilva had been running for freelance programmers to send them their best efforts. They did, Quicksilva liked them, resulting in all 14 new titles being freelanced submissions rather than in-house productions.



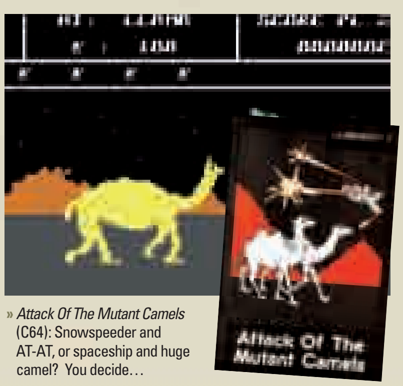
» *Monster Muncher* (Spectrum): Released for both Spectrum and Vic-20, Spectrum Games employed the services of Mr M Smith for the Vic version.

Among the new games were *Astro Blaster* and *Frenzy* for the Spectrum; the BBC machines had *Wizard* and *Protector*, the ZX81 featured *Pioneer Trail* and *Ocean Trader*, and the Vic 20 had *SkyHawk*. Coincidentally, this month also saw *Velnor's Lair*, a game that would later be re-released by Quicksilva, become available through mail order from Neptune Computing. The creator, one Mr Derek Brewster, he of *Crash* adventure column fame, later went on to write *Codename Matt* for Micromega.

Imagine Software, which was riding high on the recent success of *Arcadia*, released its newest game, *Ah Diddums*, for the Spectrum. You take on the role of a pea-shooter-wielding teddy bear taking on a variety of nasty toys. The Liverpool-based company also released *Catcha Snatcha*, available for the Commodore Vic-20. Playing the part of a store detective, you have to clear floors of thieves, dogs and bomb threats while also attempting to gain popularity with your boss.

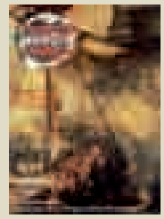
Spectrum Games, the producer of, er, Spectrum games began advertising its newest releases with *Monster Muncher*, available for both Spectrum and Vic-20, on the frontline of its advertising campaign. The game itself was simply another *Pac-Man* variant, although, rather oddly, Matthew Smith programmed the Vic-20 conversion. Yes, that one, the one that hardly ever gets a mention…

Spectrum Games only released a handful of games and, after some



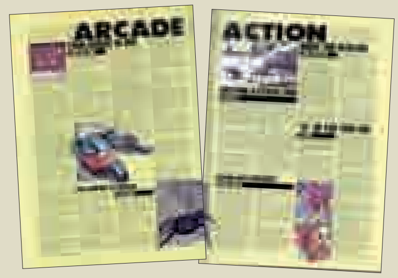
» *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* (C64): Snowspeeder and AT-AT, or spaceship and huge camel? You decide…

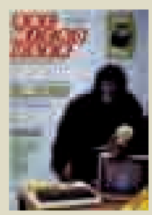
WHAT THE MAGAZINES WERE SAYING...



C&VG

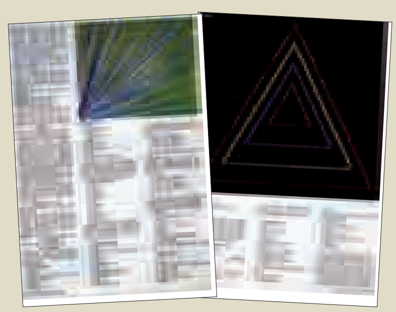
Issue 18 began with a cracking cover supplied by guest artist, JMW Turner, of *The Battle Of Trafalgar* and continued with the regular arcade round-up featuring a review of *Pole Position* and tips on how to play *Tron*. There was also a preview of the new *Pac-Man* pinball machine, *Tilt*.

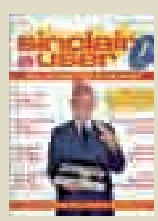




BBC Micro User

It's only the second issue and *BBC User* already has a monkey playing with a Barbie doll on the front cover. Inside there's a detailed feature on creating graphics. Unfortunately they mostly look like the vortex explosion on old kids TV series *The Adventure Game*. Doogy Rev…





Sinclair User

Sinclair User featured an article on the new wave of Sinclair-branded software, which, up to that point, had been disappointing. With new titles like *The Hobbit*, *Vu-3D* and *Inca Curse*, this was apparently enough to satisfy the reviewer, but really *The Hobbit* was the only quality title.

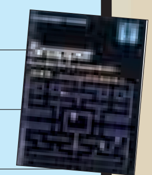


CHARTS

APRIL 1983

BBC

1 Snapper (Acornsoft)
2 Planetoids (Acornsoft)
3 Rocket Raid (Acornsoft)
4 Chess (Program Power)
5 Creative Graphics (Acornsoft)



SPECTRUM

1 Penetrator (Melbourne House)
2 Galaxians (Artic)
3 Arcadia (Imagine)
4 Escape (New Generation Software)
5 Transylvanian Tower (Richard Shepherd)



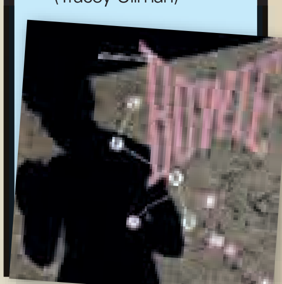
DRAGON 32

1 Donkey King (Microdeal)
2 Dragon Trek (Salamander Software)
3 Attack (PSS)
4 Katerpillar Attack (Microdeal)
5 Planet Invasion (Microdeal)

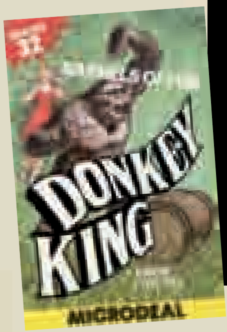


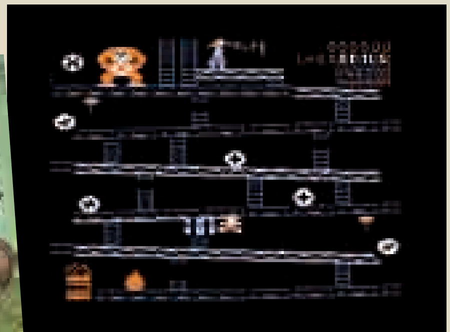
MUSIC SINGLES CHART APRIL '83

1 Let's Dance (David Bowie)
2 Is There Something I Should Know (DuranDuran)
3 Church Of The Posion Mind (Culture Club)
4 Boxer Beat (Joboxers)
5 Breakaway (Tracey Ullman)





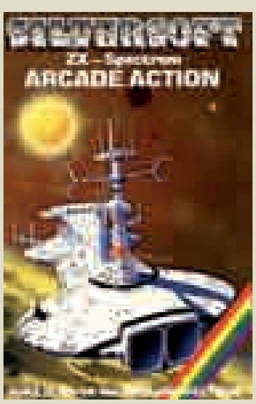




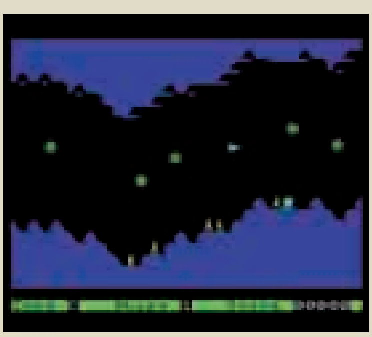
» **Above and right:** *Donkey King* (Dragon 32): A pretty faithful conversion of the classic game and it plays really well too.



» The most beautiful object in the world. Go and buy two now and keep one as a spare, just in case the other one breaks.



» *Ground Attack* (Spectrum): Silversoft's rendition of a classic formula. Not a bad game, not great, but not bad.



financial shenanigans, later liquidated and reformed almost instantly into the all-powerful Ocean Software company. That sort of thing would never happen in the publishing business.

If you want to play *Pac-Man*, *Zaxxon* and *Donkey Kong* but without all the hassle of having to actually own a computer, while also introducing the world of gaming to your musty-smelling elders, then Milton Bradley had something that was right up your boulevard. The three aforementioned games, along with *Defender*, *Berserk* and *Frogger*, had all been converted, by means of glue, string, and bits of old paper, into board games for 'all the family.'

MB Games also had something else, something a lot more exciting, up its board-gaming sleeves. Ready for release within the next month was a brand spanking new console featuring vector graphics and a very modern arcade-like styling with an in-built monitor and controller.

The Vectrex games system was standing by for its launch in the UK, and looked to be superb. The monitor was black and white with the illusion of colour being achieved by placing coloured plastic overlays, which came with each game, over the screen. MB Games hinted that the release price would be £139, games would be around £19.99 each and a free title, in the form of *Mine Storm*, would also come with the console.

The ever-expanding computer gaming magazine world, which was about to get even bigger with the next month's release of the new *Dragon User* magazine, had a varied selection of new software titles on review for the eager beavers of gamesland.

NEWS

APRIL 1983

Adolph Hitler hit the news for his literary escapades on 25 April when his diaries, supposedly hidden in a barn by an Eastern German officer after recovering them from a crashed plane, were published for the first time in a German magazine and UK newspaper *The Sunday Times*. Mr Hitler's own account of World War II was eagerly awaited with fortunes changing hands to publish the diaries. Unfortunately, a British historian evaluating the diaries, who was initially convinced by their authenticity, later announced he was unsure if they were genuine. Testing of the paper, glue and ink later showed the diaries were indeed fake…

Also available on eBay right now… Lord Lucan's tash…

7 April saw the first space walk from a space shuttle, the ill-fated Challenger. The sixth shuttle mission began on the fourth and ended five days later. The walk itself lasted for four hours and 17 minutes.

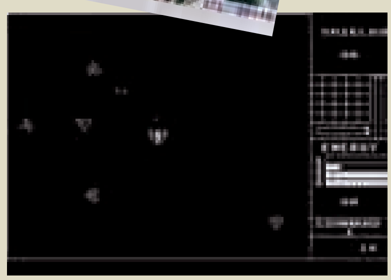
With the average life of a £1 note lasting only nine months, the much-used monetary unit was targeted for modernisation and transformation into something a little more hard-wearing. After many months of planning, 21 April saw the introduction of the first one pound coins into circulation in the UK. People loathed them…



» Hitler's diaries threatened to be a literary flop until Sue Townsend got hold of them.



» The folding stuff made way for the nickel/brass and zinc unfolding stuff.



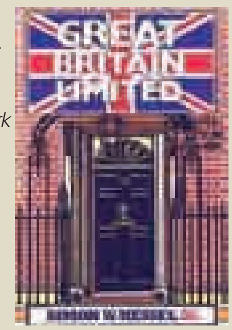
» *Starship Command* (BBC): Smooth-playing space shooter from Acornsoft. Not much colour but great to play.

Issue 18 of *Computer & Video Games* magazine featured reviews for *3D Tunnel* (New Generation Software, Spectrum), *Penetrator* (Melbourne House, Spectrum), *Starship Command* (Acornsoft, BBC) and *Galaxians* (Atari, Atari 400/800).

Personal Computing Today belatedly reviewed *Arcadia*, (Imagine, Vic-20), *The Hobbit* (Melbourne House, Spectrum), *Cyclon Attack* (Acorn Atom, A'n'F Software) and *Skramble* (Rabbit Software, Vic-20), most of which had been reviewed by other magazines a couple of months before.

Home Computing Weekly included reviews for *Print Shop* (CCS, Spectrum), *Monster Mine* (Gem Software, Dragon 32), *Donkey King* (Microdeal, Dragon 32), *Tobor* (Elfin Software, Spectrum), *Ground Attack* (Silversoft, Spectrum), *Pimania* (Automata, Dragon 32), *Jackpot* (Computer Rentals, Spectrum), *Rox 64* (Llamasoft, Commodore 64) and *Gridrunner* (Llamasoft, Commodore 64).

Another weekly magazine called *Personal Computer News*, had a diverse selection box of games on review. *Lunar Leeper* (Sierra Vision, Apple II), *The Dark Crystal* (Apple II, Sierra-Online), *Up, Up Away* (Atari 400/800, Pulsar Software), *Great Britain Limited* (Simon Wessel Software, Spectrum) and *Wizard War* (Salamander Software, Dragon 32) were all given a thorough examination.



» Great Britain Limited (Spectrum): Manage the country in *Football Manager* style. Cheaper taxes, booze down and *RG* under a quid. Nice.

And finally, the longest running Sinclair-based magazine, *Sinclair User*, ran its rule over a whole swarm of new Speccy titles including *Roman Empire* (Lothlorien), *High Noon*, *Base Invaders* and *Do Not Pass Go* (all from Work Force), *Masterchess* (Mikro-Gen) and *Frogger* (DJL Software) for the ZX81.



» *Gridrunner* (Vic-20): Jeff Minter's cartridge game took the USA by storm. No wonder a sequel, *Matrix*, wasn't too far behind…

STRIDER

IT ALL ENDS NOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE ACTION
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £60+ PCB BOARD



HISTORY

There's a scene towards the end of *Love Actually* where some crazy fool uses a combination of words and pictures to profess his unending love for boyish looking Keira Knightly in order to get her out of his system. This is my attempt to do the same with Capcom's *Strider.* After a few months of Retro Gamer starting back up, readers would write in and ask why I'm so obsessed with Capcom's purple clad ninja (he's effectively crept into every issue since the relaunch).

The truth of the matter is that I really don't know why I obsess – and it is an obsession – over him so. It's not my favourite game of all time, that honour goes to *Robotron: 2084*, and it's not the best looking game ever created (although it looked rather tasty when it was first released) so why do I have to fire it up religiously every day? Even our art designer knows the opening tune off by heart as Strider swoops into a futuristic looking Soviet Russia and she likes the game about as much as I enjoy shopping for women's clothes.

Maybe it takes me back to a particularly enjoyable trip to Barry Island in my youth when I first fell in love with *Strider*'s meticulous animation and impressive athleticism, or perhaps it harks back to when I rediscovered it on Sega's Mega Drive (complete with a new excellent soundtrack). Whatever the reason, the collage of shots on the right serves several purposes. It allows you to see one of my favourite games in all its glorious splendour, it appeases those readers who complain that one blown up screenshot is a waste of two pages, but perhaps most importantly, it's allowing me to move on, perhaps to a new videogame hero.

If I ever manage to convince *Strider*'s creator, Isuke, to talk then the ninja will no doubt reappear in the magazine, but until that time *Strider* has swung his laser sword for the very last time…





THE MAKING OF...



BANJO KAZOOIE

Rhyming witches, annoying sidekicks, short-sighted moles – Banjo Kazooie had it all. Join Retro Gamer as it uncovers the secrets behind one of the greatest N64 platformers ever made.





"PROJECT DREAM STARTED OFF LIFE AS AN ADVENTURE GAME ON THE NINTENDO SNES" GREGG MAYLES

Spend any amount of time talking to Rare's Gregg Mayles (now creative director) and Chris Sutherland and it becomes obvious that they genuinely love the games they get to create. It's a fact that becomes continually apparent when we were lucky enough to talk to them about the conception of *Banjo Kazooie*, easily one of Rare's best N64 titles. Of course when you consider that this is the same Rare that was also responsible for such N64 hits as *GoldenEye*, *Blast Corps*, *Conker's Bad Fur Day* and *Perfect Dark*, *Banjo*'s enduring success becomes even more impressive. And to think that when development on *Project Dream* (as it was originally known) first began the affable Banjo wasn't even in it!

"It was definitely a convoluted route," laughs Mayles as he begins the story of one of videogaming's favourite bears.



» Grotbags eat your heart out. Gruntilda, chief nemesis of Banjo, stealer of bears and part time nose picker.

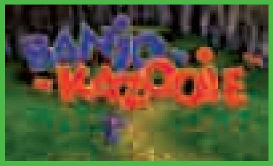
"Contrary to what many people would like to think, we didn't just have a flash of inspiration one day and say 'Right, we are going to make a humorous 3D platform adventure game featuring a affable bear in tight yellow shorts carrying a mouthy bird in a blue backpack'. The main character in *Project Dream* was initially a boy called Edison, but we felt he was too generic. So then we tried a rabbit character (that oddly ran on two legs) and then a bear. People liked the bear, the bear became Banjo, *Project Dream* became *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Banjo-Kazooie* was born."

ENTER BANJO

As Mayles has already mentioned, before the lovable Banjo came along, Rare's focus was on a young boy named Edison. But what was the story behind *Project Dream* and how exactly did the main character change from a traditional homo-sapien to an ursine? "Well, *Project Dream* originally started off life as an adventure game on the Nintendo SNES," reveals Mayles. "Edison was a boyish adventurer who inadvertently got tangled up with a bunch of no-good (but inept) pirates, led by Captain Blackeye. It was the game that the original *Donkey Kong Country* team started on after they had finished *Donkey Kong Country 2*, and it took the ACM graphics technology to the next level. The introduction of the Nintendo 64 made ACM obsolete, so we switched development over to the new machine after only a few months. Dream continued for around another year, before we realized that the scope of the game and the early choices we had made regarding technology meant it was going to take many years to complete. By this time, the main character of *Dream* had become a bear who wore a backpack purely to keep his adventuring items in. We liked the bear and wanted to make a more action-based game that centered purely on him and his abilities."

Banjo may well have gone through quite a few changes before reaching its final state, but the move from 16-bit SNES to Nintendo's 64-bit console didn't prove to be that much of a headache, as Chris Sutherland (*Banjo*'s Lead Programmer) explains. "Luckily, we were able to carry over a lot of the supporting code from *Dream*, which meant that we were able

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** RARE
» **RELEASED:** 1998
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+





» *Banjo Kazooie's* hub was huge and gave you an early impression of its sheer size.



» Once all the missing pieces had been found a new level would open up to you.

THE MAKING OF…
BANJO KAZOOIE





» An early concept sketch of the original artwork and how it ended up once it hit retail shelves.





GETTING JIGGY WITH IT

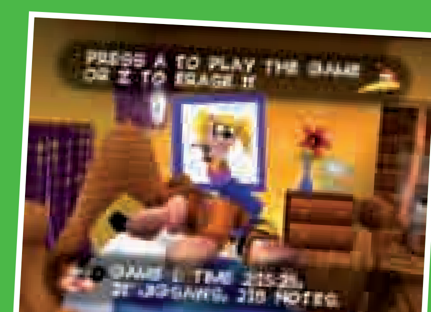
One thing that set *Banjo* apart from many other platformers was the sheer amount of different items you had to collect. Unlike other games of its ilk though, the objects in *Banjo* actually had a purpose. "Every self-respecting platform game hero has to have something to collect, but we wanted something that rather than being just a shiny object, was a shiny object that could actually be used for something," begins Mayles. "The desire to have a direct connection between this shiny object and opening up the worlds led to completing pictures of the worlds like a jigsaw, which in turn led to the missing pieces being the Jiggies. Jinjos came from a years-old idea (dating back to *Donkey Kong Country*) of having a 'hard-to-collect collectable' – one that would run away or camouflage itself instead of dumbly sitting around waiting to be collected. Funny how things turn out, as the Jinjos never ran away and even whistled to attract your attention! Actually, they were probably the dumbest collectable ever. The Feather, Eggs, Notes and Honey on the other hand were simply themed around Banjo, Kazooie and the game's musical theme."

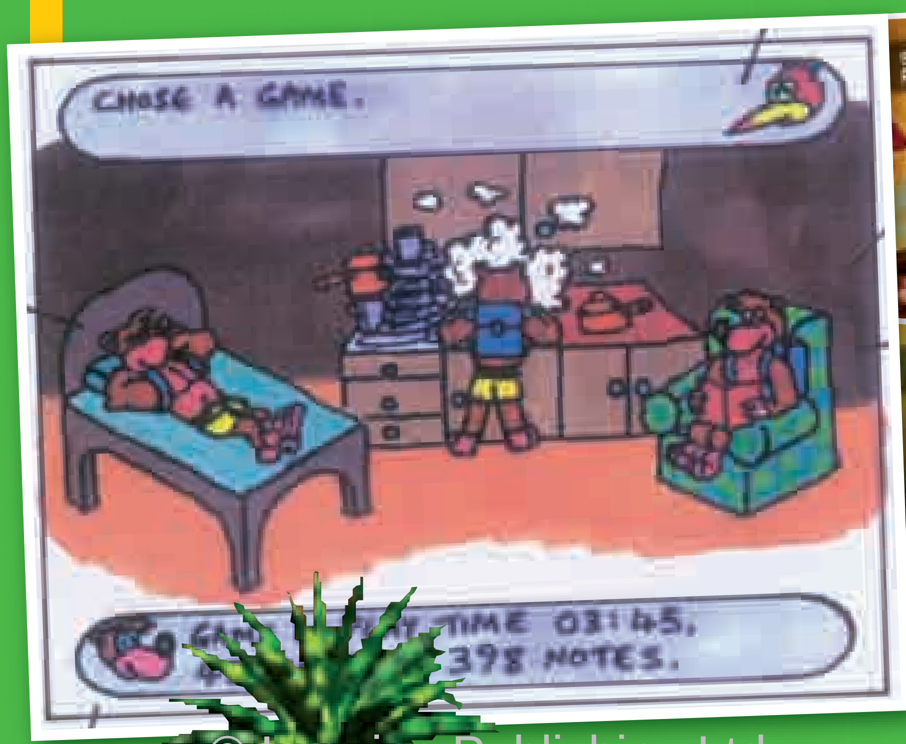
to complete *Banjo Kazooie* in less than 15 months," he reveals. "Interestingly there were two months prior to that where we experimented with using the *Dream* visual technology to create the game, then we altered our approach to better accommodate the design."

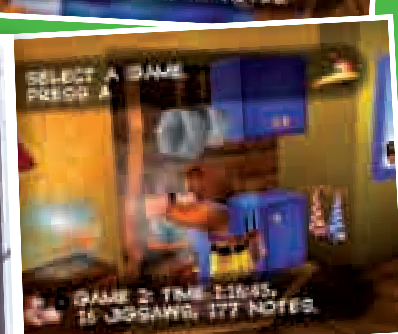
With so many alterations made to *Banjo Kazooie* over its 17-month gestation period, it's perhaps surprising to realize that it was put together by a relatively small group of coders… "We initially started with about ten people then grew to 15 by the end," confirms Mayles, who was *Banjo*'s Lead Designer at the time. "We had seven engineers, five artists, two designers and one musician. The leads in all four disciplines are still going strong at Rare, having worked on *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*, *Viva Piñata* and now Banjo's new adventure, which will be appearing on the Xbox 360."

Once *Project Dream* was officially no more and work began on *Banjo* in earnest, gamers worldwide were eager to see how Rare's latest platformer would turn out. After all, with the *Donkey Kong Country* trilogy proving to be so popular on the SNES, it was perhaps expected that Rare's first platformer for the N64 was going to be just as good. After creating such a successful series of hits on its 16-bit console, we were interested to know if there was there any pressure from Nintendo to ensure that the same magic happened on the N64? "Oh not at all," begins Mayles. "Nintendo never put any pressure on us to achieve success. I think that if you aim specifically for success it is much harder to achieve. Creating a game to the best of our ability that we hope will be successful is a far better approach. Nintendo, like Rare, only wanted to release the best games possible, so I guess you

> "NINTENDO HAD A DIFFICULT TIME UNDERSTANDING THE SELF-DEPRECATING HUMOUR AND NEVER-ENDING TORRENT OF SARCASM THAT KAZOOIE CONSTANTLY DISHED OUT"
> GREGG MAYLES

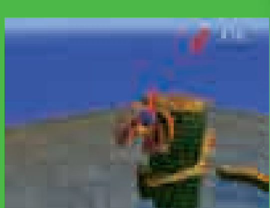




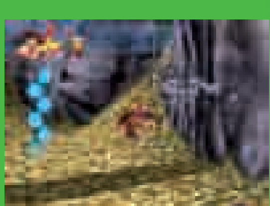




» As you can see from this original sketch these final N64 loading screens are extremely similar to the art that originally inspired them.



» Once you found the red launch pad it was possible to take to the air. All the better for exploring *Banjo*'s beautiful worlds.



» Swimming sees the music softening and lots and lots of bubbles.





» An early sketch of the warping Dingpot, and how it eventually looked in the finished game.

could say we put ourselves under pressure to deliver a great game. Of course, not all great games are successful, but we were fortunate that *Banjo* was considered both a good game and a very successful one."

Indeed, *Banjo Kazooie* proved to be an incredible success, and while it was unable to match the 8 million sales that Rare's *GoldenEye* had achieved, it ended up receiving impressive scores from virtually every magazine and website that reviewed it. In fact, in the eyes of many gamers, here was a platformer that finally managed to improve on the majesty that was Miyamoto's *Super Mario 64*. We were keen to know if Rare had ever planned on making a '*Mario 64* beater' from the very beginning. "Not really," states Sutherland. "Setting out with the intention of making an 'improved version' of another game would be quite uninspiring to work on, so that's not something we've ever done," he explains. "Instead you have to create your own path and follow that – certainly you can take inspiration from other games and *Mario 64* was just one of those games."

But what did Nintendo think about *Banjo Kazooie*? And did it ever have a say in the direction it would end up taking. After all, we could imagine that Miyamoto was watching the project with quite a lot of interest. "There's was very little actually," confirms Mayles. "Seeing that *Banjo* was actually Rare's creation, we didn't have to show Nintendo what we were doing until we were happy the game was what we wanted it to be. I think that some people at Nintendo had a difficult time understanding the self-deprecating humour and never-ending torrent of sarcasm that Kazooie constantly dished out, although this didn't prevent the game from becoming popular in Japan. Every 3D platform game owes a respective nod to Nintendo and Miyamoto-san, and for anyone to even compare *Banjo* to the piece of gaming history that was *Mario 64* is a great honour indeed."

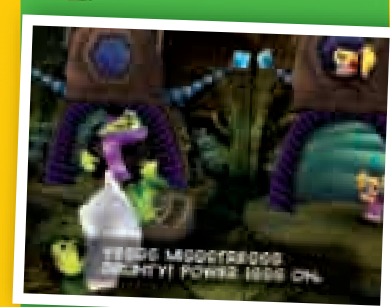
Rare may have not set out to create a '*Mario 64* beater' but it's obvious that the two games do share some common traits. Impressive cameras, a variety of memorable characters and plenty of inventive levels to explore are just a few of the similarities to be found in the two classic titles. One area where Banjo did have the edge though was in its special moves. While Mario was no slouch in the wall-jumping and somersaulting departments, he couldn't hope to compete with the dazzling array of specials that Banjo and Kazooie had access to. As well as traditional bottom slams and double-jumps, the dynamic duo were also able to shoot eggs at opponents, use Kazooie's beak to peck at enemies and even flip through 180 degrees, so Kazooie could use her long legs to climb surfaces that were too inclined for Banjo to access. Although the pair worked beautifully together, like Banjo, Kazooie's involvement in the game came at a much later stage.

ENTER KAZOOIE

"Initially Kazooie didn't even exist; it was just Banjo on his own," reveals Mayles. "During the planning of Banjo's abilities, we thought it would be a good idea if he had a traditional 'double-jump', so that he could get himself out of mid-air trouble and also cover greater distances. The problem was that just activating a second jump



» A very early shot of how Project Dream initially looked on the N64.



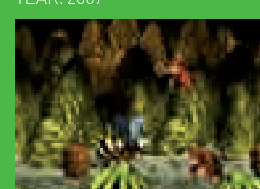
» Lose all your lifes and you'd witness this amusing cutscene.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SABRE WULF
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD, BBC, COMMODORE 64, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1984

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY
SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1994

DIDDY KONG RACING DS
SYSTEMS: NINTENDO DS
YEAR: 2007



THE MAKING OF…
BANJO KAZOOIE





in mid-air looked rather odd – a way was needed to make it look more believable. We came up with the (looking back, extremely wacky) idea that a pair of wings could appear from his backpack to help him perform the second jump. We also wanted Banjo to be able to run very fast when required, so as the idea with the 'double-jump' wings had worked so well, we added a pair of 'fast running' legs that appeared from the bottom of the backpack. So we had wings and legs, and soon after we came up with the logical conclusion (well, it was to us) that these could belong to another character, one that actually lived in Banjo's backpack. This character became Kazooie and we transferred most of Banjo's moves to her, adding her sarcastic wit as a contrast to Banjo's good natured charm for good measure."

As well as sharing a number of special skills, it was also possible for the pair to transform into a number of different animals that ranged from a crocodile to a termite in order to retrieve otherwise unreachable items.

"ELEMENTS OF FUNGUS FOREST EVENTUALLY FOUND THEIR WAY INTO DONKEY KONG 64, WHILE MOUNT FIRE EYES WAS INCORPORATED INTO BANJO-TOOIE AS HAILFIRE PEAKS" CHRIS SUTHERLAND



Transformations weren't straightforward though and it was impossible to change into a new form unless you had collected the required number of Mumbo tokens that were carefully hidden throughout the massive game worlds. Once you had enough, Mumbo Jumbo would use his voodoo magic and you could continue to explore Banjo's nine huge levels from a brand new perspective. "The actual transformations were dictated by the level design," explains Sutherland. "Once all the level themes had been decided upon (which was done before work on the first one commenced) we looked through them and picked the ones where we thought the transformations would be most suited. After this, it was just a matter of coming up with a suitably interesting transformation for the theme of the level and what abilities the transformation could have. The idea for the transformations came about from wanting Banjo to be made small on Mumbo's Mountain (the first level) so that it gave the level a different sense of scale. But rather than just shrinking the main character (which had been done before) we hit upon the idea that he could be changed into an alternative, equally small form – the Termite."

MEET THE CAST

Despite the main focus of *Banjo* being on its two heroes and their array of special moves and transformation skills, there were plenty of supporting player characters, many of which are just as memorable as the bird and bear double act. Bottles the mole was on hand to explain the many new moves that Banjo and Kazooie would gain access to, while Mumbo Jumbo was a Witch Doctor who could transform Banjo into a variety of different beasts, thus helping the loveable bear to complete specific tasks in his new guises. Perhaps the most memorable character of all though was Gruntilda the witch, a vain, evil hag with a penchant for speaking in rhyme and capturing Banjo's sister Tooty at the beginning of the game,



» The beginning of Treasure Trove Cove. Return here to return to the main game hub.

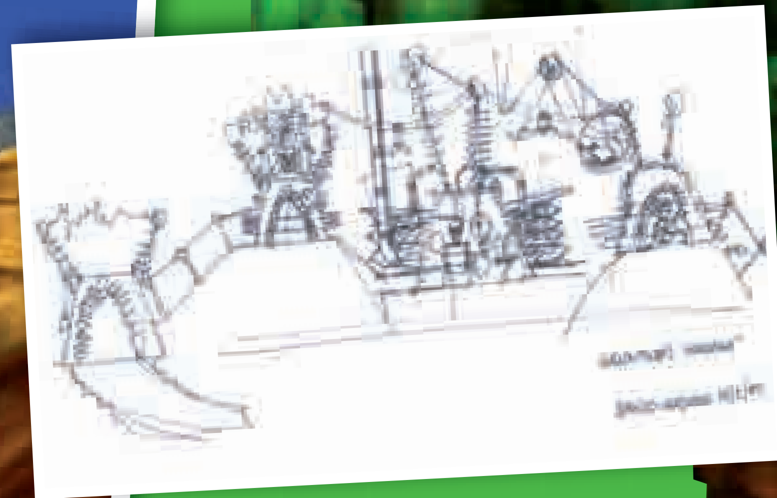
an act that spurs Banjo into undertaking his epic adventure. With all the characters having such distinct personalities, we asked Mayles if they had been based on anyone in real life – the Stamper brothers perhaps? "Banjo and Kazooie no, but Bottles could be likened to the typical clever kid in every school that wore really thick glasses – hence the Bottles family all having slang terms for such spectacles as their names," confirms Mayles. "Gruntilda on the other hand was inspired by Grotbags, the bumbling incompetent witch from *Emu's Pink Windmill Show*." Darn, so the rumours of Chris Stamper carrying his brother round the Rare offices on his back are obviously untrue then…

Perhaps one of the reasons why gamers shared such an affinity with Banjo and Kazooie was because of the charming way that they communicated with each other and



» Banjo's double-jump proved to be extremely useful for timing jumps properly.





» **Left:** He looks menacing, but this giant hermit crab is easy to defeat and hides a golden secret. **Right:** An early sketch of Gruntilda's transformation machine.

the other residents of Banjo's world. Like the *Zelda* games, there's no real speech to speak of, just some rather cute mumbling that perfectly suits the cartoony nature of the game. "One of the things you have to remember is back then speech for games was still in its relative infancy, and less than convincing speech heard in some games made us feel that it didn't really add to the experience," explains Mayles when questioned about the characters' distinct voices. "We didn't want to ruin player's perceptions of the characters by getting their voices wrong, but we did want the characters to be heard – so we hit upon a compromise. The mumbling allowed us to convey the personality of the characters without them actually speaking, and of course was very easy to implement. It also added a certain endearing charm that a lot of players have commented on and it was something that made the game unique."

It wasn't just the voice characterization that made *Banjo Kazooie* stand apart from its peers. It also just happened to open with one of the most hilarious musical intros the videogaming world has even seen, and even today it never fails to raise a smile. Knocking on the screen to get your attention, Banjo immediately launches into an amazing hoedown that sees him joined by sister Tooty, the annoying Kazooie and Mumbo Jumbo, who constantly outplays Banjo, much to the bear's frustration. It's a delightful sequence that fully sums up Rare's legendary status on the N64 at the time, but where did the idea originate? "Well, only Banjo had a name to begin with and someone remarked that if he was called Banjo he should play one," begins Mayles. "In order for his bird companion to fit in musically (and so they could play a duet for some as yet unforeseen reason which eventually became the hoedown) we gave her a Kazoo and named her after it. A Kazoo was chosen, as it can be a really annoying instrument, much like the personality of the bird. Unfortunately, we had trademark problems with Kazoo, so we changed it to Kazooie. Tooty and Mumbo were given instruments for no reason other than it allowed them to join in with the hoedown and be introduced to the player before they even started the game. We actually tried a similar tongue in cheek approach with the 'DK Rap' at the start of *Donkey Kong 64* (which coincidentally featured Banjo's lead engineer as one half of the rapping duo during a break from coding and supplying voices for Banjo and Kazooie), but this was received with less affection as people thought we were trying to be serious. I think Grant (Banjo and *DK64*'s musician) is still bitter about this to the current day – in fact I'm sure he'll have something to say about it, yet again,



» **Above:** The original false ending that never appeared in the final game.

HOEDOWN SHOWDOWN

It's one of the funniest openings in any videogame so we thought we'd show you *Banjo*'s classic hoedown in all its glory. Ooh, we really spoil you sometimes.



THE MAKING OF... BANJO KAZOOIE

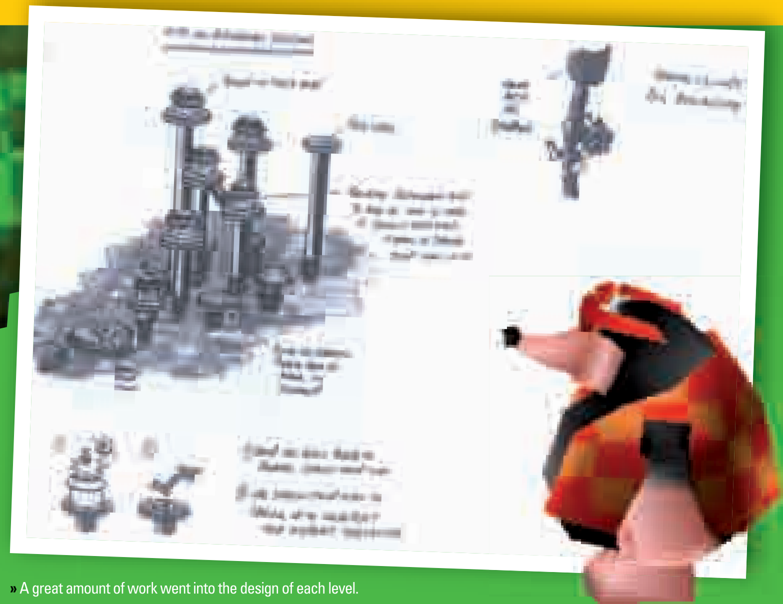
when he reads this.”

BRAVE NEW WORLDS

As can be expected from a game that starts off with a ‘duelling banjos-styled’ hoedown between a competitive bear and witch doctor, *Banjo Kazooie* happened to have an extremely memorable soundtrack. Filled with musical flair and beautiful touches (check out how the volume becomes all muffled when you swim under water) its cheerful tunes perfectly captured the atmosphere of each level you explored. From the jaunty jingle of Treasure Trove Cove to the sombre tones that accompanied the exploration of Grunty’s lair, *Banjo*’s many tunes worked perfectly. Throw in an assortment of incredibly cute spot effects and here was a game that sounded as good as it played. Despite the music being some of the best we’ve heard on an N64 platformer (that’s right, we prefer it to *Mario 64*’s) it was *Banjo*’s excellent graphics that really managed to impress and even today it remains a visually alluring title. While a recent play revealed it to be nowhere near as populated as we once remembered, the stunning level design and creation is still achingly obvious and it makes the somewhat simplistic looking (though no well less designed) world of *Super Mario 64* appear rather dull in comparison. “From an art perspective, the characters were created with minimal amounts of texturing; this gave them a very clean look,” explains Sutherland. “The backgrounds on the other hand had a very large number of textures and in many cases we used very big textures cut into several 64*64 pieces (the largest texture size the N64 could draw). This meant we were able to avoid having tiling textures everywhere. Also we used a decal technique that allowed us to blend areas of textures into one another. Overall having a very detailed background mixed with clean simple characters created a great visual contrast.”

While the end result was undeniably superb, the complex visual look provided Sutherland with more than a few headaches… “From a software perspective, we pushed the memory of the system very hard,” continues Sutherland. “As you move the camera around the map in *Banjo Kazooie*, the machine is constantly throwing out of memory things you can’t see and pulling in the scenery that appears into view. This gave us major memory fragmentation issues (“fragmentation”, to try to give a non-technical analogy, is like when you want to place a big box on your desk, but can’t because there’s too much paperwork scattered around it. To fix this, you first need to move all the little bits of clutter together to create a big enough space, then you can place the box down). We used a proprietary system that “reshuffled” memory continuously as you played to eliminate the fragmentation. I’d doubt many N64 games of the time did anything like that – overall it meant we could dedicate a higher number of polygons to the characters and backgrounds than many other games at the time managed.”

It may have pushed the machine to its limits but the results were there for everyone to see. Each of *Banjo*’s nine levels may have been based on the sort of environments that had appeared in countless other platform titles, but clever level design and familiar themes made the outlandish looking locations instantly recognizable. “We wanted players to be able to travel to places that were larger than life, but still relatively believable in a fantastical way. Once a theme for a world had been chosen, we brainstormed as many ideas as possible that you would expect to see in such a location, then used these ideas to shape the world, before adding a twist of humour as the finishing touch. Taking Treasure Trove Cove as an example, we wanted everything possible that you would imagine a desert island to have – crabs, pirates, a wrecked ship, a



» A great amount of work went into the design of each level.

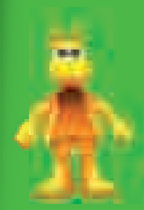




» **Left:** Bottles was a short-sighted mole who would teach you new special moves.
Right: These green pads would allow Banjo and Kazooie to leap even higher than usual.







» **Left:** An early sketch of a Jingo, and above, how they ended up.

sandcastle, a lighthouse and treasure (where X marks the spot of course).”

THE MISSING WORLDS

While nine huge worlds to explore seemed more than generous, Rare had actually intended to include several more. Unfortunately, time constraints meant that levels like Hammerhead Beach and Fungus Forest were cut out. They didn't disappear forever though… “It's easy to think up more ideas than are necessary or possible,” continues Sutherland when we asked him about the infamous missing levels. “Fungus Forest and Mount Fire Eyes were additional levels that weren't needed, whereas I think Hammerhead Beach was something to do with the fabled Stop 'n' Swop. Elements of Fungus Forest eventually found their way into *Donkey Kong 64*, while Mount Fire Eyes was incorporated into *Banjo-Tooie* as Hailfire Peaks. There were also other ideas for levels that were transferred to the sequel – Glitter Gulch Mine (mine) and Witchyworld (fairground).” So if you had to drop several levels was there anything else that failed to make the final cut? “Definitely,” continues Sutherland. “We had actually planned a surprise ending and additional game mode. After the mighty Jinjonator had pummelled Grunty into submission atop her tower, the witch's final spell projectile intended to hit Banjo and turn him into a frog. The player would then have gained control of the rescued Tooty, who then had to search through the levels to find enough ‘Mumbo Tokens’ to transform Banjo back into his normal ursine self. This mode was dropped due to time constraints, Grunty's spell was changed so it missed and the idea for the Mumbo Tokens was eventually used in *Banjo-Tooie*.”



» All that's been released so far of the new *Banjo* game is a brief trailer that made its debut at X06. Showing the pair's attempts to get past a locked door, it perfectly captures the quirky humour of the original game.

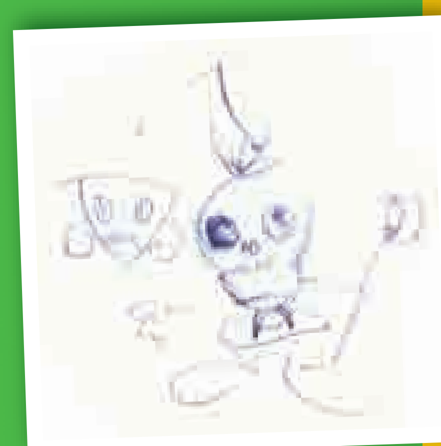
Even though several elements never made the final count, *Banjo Kazooie* proved so popular that a sequel, *Banjo-Tooie* was released two years later, and while it once again received exceptional reviews, Mayles is the first to admit that it wasn't perfect. “Even though we thought that *Banjo-Tooie*'s more complex and interlocking worlds were better than those of the original, many fans still believe that *Banjo-Kazooie* was the better game due its simpler structure,” he explains. “ I would say we got the balance right the first time and perhaps made the all too common mistake of wanting bigger, better and more for the sequel.”

Some gamers may not have preferred Banjo's second adventure, but that doesn't mean that the franchise is forgotten and Rare is now once again hard at work on a new *Banjo* title for the Xbox 360. While little has been revealed yet, the amusing video that was released at X06 suggests that Rare has lost none of its humour. But were they prepared to tell us any more about Banjo's new adventure? “Can't tell you much I'm afraid,” continues Mayles, “but our aim is to take the 3D platform adventuring game into the next generation and do something more than just adding polygons. Some fans look back fondly and want more of the same, but the *Banjo* of yesteryear has no real place in tomorrow's market on the Xbox 360. What we want to do is retain all the elements that made the first two games so loved, but also try things that breathe new life into a genre that has sadly been neglected for many years. I think old and new fans alike will love it (although let's face it, I would say that).” While Mayles is obviously reluctant to reveal more about Rare's latest project, his love for the series is evident for all to see and it's fitting perhaps that he gets the last word on why he feels the game remains so loved. “We built *Banjo Kazooie* on a combination of dysfunctional characters, variety of gameplay, humour and impressive locations – I can only assume that some of these are what gamers remember. I certainly hope so, as we have plenty more of all of these to come!”



STOP 'N' SWOP TILL YOU DROP

One of the most infamous stories surrounding *Banjo Kazooie* is its fabled Stop 'N' Swop, which would, allegedly, have allowed data to be transferred between both *Banjo Kazooie* and its sequel *Banjo-Tooie*. Over the last nine years Stop 'N' Swop has been the subject of much speculation on a number of forums and, sadly, it would appear that Rare is in no hurry to reveal the actual truth behind it. Not just yet anyway… “We couldn't believe the amount of attention this feature attracted,” admits Mayles. “Even now there are a dedicated bunch of fans (hello Rare Witch Project) determined to hack the truth out of the game. We've seen all sorts of speculation over the years and it has kept us highly entertained. In fact I actually posted on their forums once, offering to reveal all, but I was dismissed as a crank. Secretly I don't think they want to know, as trying to find out the answer is far more fun than knowing it. So I'm going to say nothing yet again, although we are considering revealing the truth somewhere in the third game, as some kind of anniversary treat.” Chris Sutherland was no more forthcoming. “For reasons I can't explain I doubt if all the details could ever be revealed on this, but in the meantime I guess you'll have to wait for the Xbox 360 game to see…” Aaarrggh!!



» An early sketch of Mumbo Jumbo, the coolest saxaphone player ever.

"WE WANTED PLAYERS TO BE ABLE TO TRAVEL TO PLACES THAT WERE LARGER THAN LIFE, BUT STILL RELATIVELY BELIEVABLE IN A FANTASTICAL WAY"

GREGG MAYLES

Special thanks to Gregg Mayles, Chris Sutherland, Simon Farmer, and finally, Wil Overton who made all this possible.

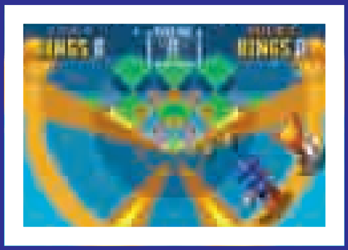


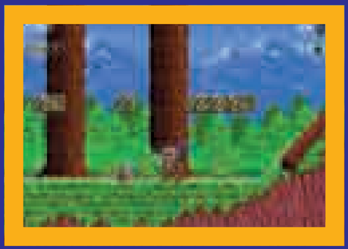



AND YOU THOUGHT IT WAS ONLY SONIC TEAM THAT MADE SONIC THE HEDGEHOG GAMES…










SEGA TECHNICAL INSTITUTE



» STI worked on a handful of 3D games, but *Die Hard* was the only game it finished.

Sonic Team, AM2, Team Andromeda: these are the names that spring to mind when we think of Sega's greatest in-house development teams. Yet a comparably unknown development team was responsible for many of its best games of the Nineties. Ashley Day lifts the lid on Sega's best-kept secret.



» *Die Hard Arcade* is the only coin-op game the STI has known to have developed to completion.

Did you know that very few of the *Sonic The Hedgehog* games were actually developed in Japan? To many hardcore Sega fans it's common knowledge, but we're willing to bet that most people are still unaware of this. After all, the startup sequences to the games all feature the Sega logo with no clue to their true origin. The truth is that of all the Mega Drive's *Sonic* platformers, only the first was actually developed by the true Sonic Team. The rest were put together by the unique and fascinating Sega Technical Institute.

Our story begins with Mark Cerny. A veteran of the games industry since 1982, Cerny had originally worked at Atari's coin-op division and even created *Marble Madness*, but soon found himself working on the Master System launch line-up in Sega's Tokyo headquarters. Following a very successful run at the company, where he pioneered the Master System's 3D Glasses amongst other things, Cerny returned to America in early 1990 just as Yuji Naka started work on the first *Sonic The Hedgehog*. Fast-forward to over a year later and *Sonic* fever had taken over the world and changed everything for Sega. One of its biggest changes and possibly its most experimental project to date was to allow Cerny to start up the STI.

By combining talent from Sega of Japan, including *Sonic* creators Yuji Naka and Hirokazu Yasuhara, with newcomers to Sega of America, Cerny's idea was to create an elite development studio that would harness the best design philosophies that both countries had to offer. The intention was that the fresh American recruits would learn from the experience of the Japanese and together they would produce original character-based games and new *Sonic* titles. Yet, right from the start, things didn't exactly go according to plan.

In 1991, the STI began work on its first projects. Two, which would eventually become *Kid Chameleon* and *Greendog*, were started early in the year, while the sequel to *Sonic The Hedgehog* would begin later on with a development team made up of half Japanese developers and half American. Speaking to the website SEGA-16.COM in late 2006, Cerny recalled, "I asked marketing the obvious question, 'would you like another *Sonic*?' Bizarrely, the response was 'no, it's much too soon'. So we found another game to make and, in November, as we were getting started, marketing came back and said 'oops, we do need that game and we need it now'. So the team lost two months out of an 11-month schedule." The problems with *Sonic 2*'s development didn't end there either. "The Japanese didn't arrive until the Americans were already in place, as we had huge visa problems. Once they arrived, there were language problems and cultural problems too. *Sonic 2* did ship but after that we said 'no more!'".

Despite its growing pains, *Sonic 2* was a huge success and many consider it to be the best in the series. Once the game was finished, however, Cerny decided to leave the Institute while the team remained in place, albeit in a divided form. The Americans would work in seclusion on *Sonic Spinball* while the Japanese would work on *Sonic 3* and, although the Institute had deviated somewhat from its original intention, it was in this form that the studio would create its most interesting games.

Following Cerny's departure, another Atari veteran, Roger Hector, stepped in to manage the studio. "I was hired to replace Mark as the VP/General Manager of STI", he confirms. "My role was to oversee everything within STI and fulfil its mission.



» The special stages from *Sonic 2* looked amazing back in 1992.

IN THE KNOW

Sonic Team, originally Sega AM8, took its name from the classic game it created in 1991. Formed in Japan, the company split into pieces in 1999 with some staff relocating to form a new team in the USA. The original line-up of developers has now all but disbanded; Sonic Team exists in name only. Founder member Yuji Naka has formed a new studio, and Sonic Team USA is no more.



» Sonic. The little hedgehog that could.

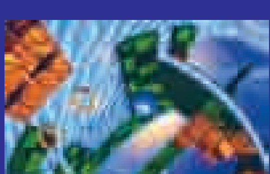
SEGA TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ

Roger Hector recalls one of his weirdest days at the STI: "A real highlight was the time we did a live MTV broadcast of a *Sonic* game competition from Alcatraz Island in the middle of San Francisco Bay. Hundreds of people were brought in by boat, and film crews and dozens of players flown in from all around the world. Many game stations had been set up inside the old prison, and the players furiously competed for a big cash prize on live TV. But as it turned out, the US Navy's Blue Angels precision jet team were performing that day over the bay, and they were using Alcatraz Island as the centre point of their show. We were putting on a show for MTV and were being buzzed by real fighter jets at the same time! It was wild!"



» The Japanese box art to STI's *Sonic Spinball*.



» *Sonic X-Treme* may well have saved the Saturn but was sadly canned before it was finished.

"I ENJOYED WORKING WITH YUJI NAKA. HE WAS EXTREMELY TALENTED AND DEDICATED. A VERY NICE MAN REALLY. HE WAS A PERFECTIONIST"

ROGER HECTOR

I had an extensive background in creative game development and management, and I was in charge of game development at Disney at the time. Sega was a successful Disney licensor, and I had already worked with Sega on several projects. So it was a natural evolution and I already had a good relationship with the company."

Even though Hector had plenty of experience working with Sega, the peculiarity of the Technical Institute must still have made for quite an unusual working environment. "STI was a unique place because we didn't fit into the normal org chart of the company", he agrees. "Although, technically, we reported directly to both Sega of Japan and Sega of America, we were pretty independent, which kept it fun. By not having to fit into the day-in, day-out structures of a big corporation, we were able to concentrate on creating fun games. This is what made STI very special."

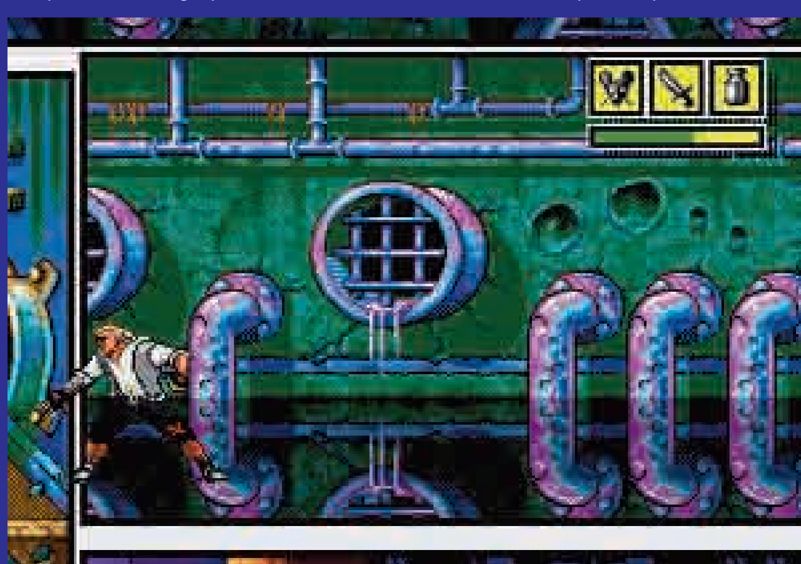
"My favourite part was working daily with some of the best people in the industry", says Hector, who was privileged enough to work side by side with some of Sega Japan's greatest designers. "I enjoyed working with Yuji Naka. He was extremely talented and dedicated. A very nice man really. He was a perfectionist, and very demanding. But that is what made him so good, and I respected his integrity. He considered *Sonic* to be a prize creation, and he was critical of some of the other *Sonic* games that were developed outside of the core Sonic group. This was understandable, as he was one of the proud fathers of *Sonic*. But he also understood that he could not make every *Sonic* game."

During STI's middle years Hector would oversee both sides of the Institute. The Japanese team, led by Yuji Naka, would work on *Sonic* platform games while the American team would work on original ideas and both avenues of development led to many fun and interesting videogames. *Sonic Spinball* turned out to be an excellent, yet underrated, pinball game, while *Sonic 3* became yet another great platformer for Sega.

Around this time, Sega of Japan had been working on its follow-up to the Mega Drive. STI were, of course, expected to develop games for the new console and so began recruiting fresh blood to help the studio in the jump to 3D. One such programmer was Adrian Stephens, a British coder who had been hired to work on the new console. Arriving midway through STI's lifespan, Stephens was uniquely placed to see how the company operated and could see the division between the two nationalities. "Working alongside the Sonic team was definitely a powerful incentive for me to go to STI, but STI was really two separate entities – the Sonic team, and everyone else – with very little communication between the two. Still, there was always a sense of STI being a very independent unit from the rest of Sega of America, and we were able to work on projects that probably wouldn't have been green-lit anywhere else." Strangely, Stephens was never able to finish a full game for the system he was originally hired to deal with. The system had undergone many delays during development and wasn't quite ready to be developed for. The decision was made to stick with MD titles until its predecessor was complete and Stephens joined Peter Morawiec, the designer of *Sonic Spinball*, on a new and original project.

The Japanese team, meanwhile, soon finished *Sonic 3* and immediately began work on *Sonic & Knuckles*, an innovative platform game that came on a cartridge that allowed other games to be plugged in to the top. Cleverly, this allowed Knuckles to be used as a playable character in both *Sonic 2* and *3* – a bold and inventive feature that saw *Sonic & Knuckles* become a firm favourite with many MD owners. Roger favours it for different reasons, however. "*Sonic & Knuckles* was an amazing experience. It had so many struggles during the development that had to be overcome. Creating new franchise characters and all new large worlds was a huge challenge. But throw in problems like the Michael Jackson soundtrack that was pulled out at the last minute, and meeting the deadline with a giant live TV show broadcast scheduled for the launch, and there was tremendous pressure to hit a hard deadline with a great game. There were many times I thought we were not going to make it. But it all came together at the last possible second, and it was extremely successful. The reviews were solid, and millions of copies were sold. It was very satisfying to successfully meet the challenge, and on top of all that, I really like the game."

Sonic & Knuckles was released in October 1994, just one month before Sega's newest console, the Saturn, went on sale in Japan. By this point Sega needed all its best talent in-house to work on quality games for the system and so Yuji Naka returned home, presumably to reform Sonic Team and begin work on *NiGHTS Into Dreams*. The STI, meanwhile,



» *Comix Zone* is easily one of our favourite Mega Drive games.



» *Sonic Spinball* was promoted with these huge two-page adverts.

was left with a mostly American staff who hadn't finished a game since *Sonic Spinball*. The team had been busily working on *Comix Zone*, a scrolling fighter, that took place within the pages of a comic book, but had been hit by severe delays as the team added more features to the game. *Comix Zone* was eventually released in early 1995 and although it was an excellent game, unlike any other, it failed to sell in huge numbers thanks to the time in which it was released. The PlayStation and the Saturn had both launched worldwide and fewer people were now interested in Mega Drive titles as the novelty of 3D gaming took hold.

STI's final Mega Drive title was also released during 1995. *The Ooze* was an unusual action game in which the player controlled a blob of toxic waste that could change shape depending on the area it occupied, much as an oozing gelatinous entity would. The game was originally planned to be bundled with the Sega Nomad (a handheld Mega Drive) but missed several deadlines due to the complicated programming involved in bringing the blob character to life. As a consequence the game never saw an American release, although it did receive a limited Japanese release in September 1995 as well as an Australian release, making it one of the last Sega games to be made available on the console.

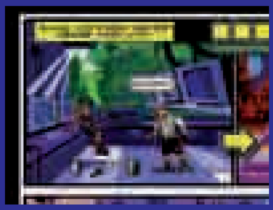
Due to their unfortunate timing, very few people got to play *Comix Zone* or *The Ooze* but those who have agree they are both great games that were worth the extended development time. Roger Hector agrees, "As it turns out, often the best games on a platform come out late in their lifespan, because that's the time when the developers have the most experience with it. It also tends to be the time when the most games are sold for that platform because its installed base has peaked. STI started small, and built itself up during the growth of the Mega Drive, and most of STI's games were released near the end of the Mega Drive's life."

There's no doubting that no matter how good these final MD games were, their protracted development times seriously affected STI's ability to move on to Saturn development at the right time. Development of 3D games started much later than it should have and the struggling studio was only able to complete one more game before it closed its doors for the last time. Fans of the coin-op beat-'em-up *Die Hard Arcade* may be surprised to know that the game was actually a co-production between the STI and Sega Japan's AM1 team. It was a rousing success in the arcade due to its popular licence and addictive gameplay, but it remains unclear just how much involvement the STI had. The game didn't bare

> "SONIC & KNUCKLES WAS AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE. IT HAD SO MANY STRUGGLES DURING THE DEVELOPMENT THAT HAD TO BE OVERCOME"
> ROGER HECTOR

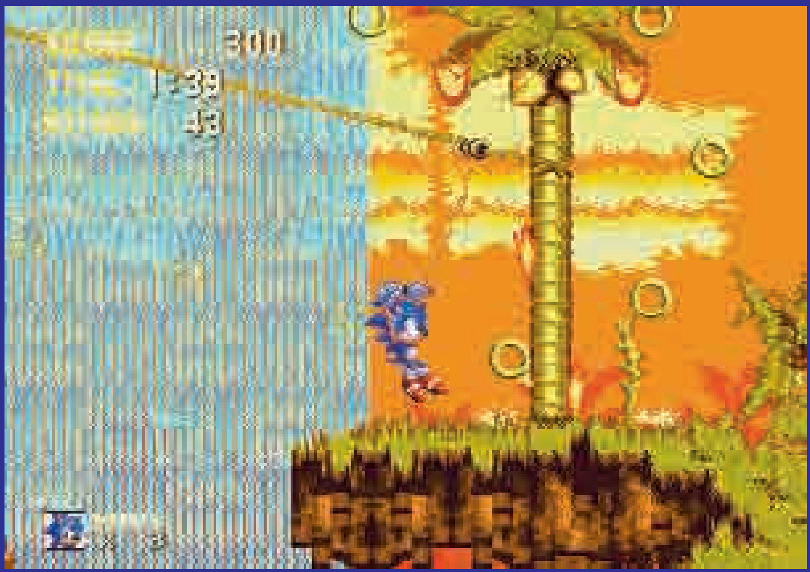
FILLING IN THE BLANKS

Even though Retro Gamer has managed to speak to several people from within the STI and trawled its extensive archives for extra details, there are still a few gaps in the story. One of the biggest problems is that it's unclear how many titles the studio actually worked on. As the vast majority of their games were unbranded, it's possible there are other Mega Drive and arcade titles that were created by the institute. Like any other form of historical study, retro gaming knowledge is always evolving as new info comes to light. So if you know of any other Sega game that the institute had a hand in then don't hesitate to write in and let us know.





» The Australian box art for *The Ooze*. You don't see this too often.



» *Sonic 3* was developed by a completely Japanese STI staff on a separate floor to the fourth American employees.



» No wonder nobody bought the Japanese version of *The Ooze*. You can barely tell it's a game at all.



FINEST HOUR
Sonic The Hedgehog 2 (Mega Drive, 1992)
It may have had a troubled development but the blistering speed, stunning levels, and those bonus stages made *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* the greatest *Sonic* game ever made. This isn't just STI's best game, it's the Mega Drive's finest hour too.

SEGA TECHNICAL INSTITUTE



» The intro to *The Ooze* was quite dark and disturbing for a Sega game.

the *Die Hard* licence in Japan, so we assume STI's major role was to work with Twentieth Century Fox to ensure the US version met their requirements.

Two further 3D games are also known to have been in the works, although neither was ever released. A sequel to *Comix Zone* was planned, which would have reworked the unique concept in 3D and presumably expanded the series into a franchise. More famously, the team was also involved in the troubled development of *Sonic X-Treme*, which went through several redesigns at various stages of development before being put to rest (see RG22 for further details).

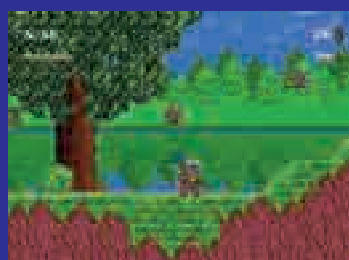
The late start to 32-bit development and the difficulty of developing for the complex Saturn architecture didn't help STI to survive during this transitional period and, according to several sources, the company soon became a less pleasant place to work. "The company had a hard time making the transition from the Mega Drive platform to the 32-bit machines", explains Hector. "Sega's Saturn had a lot of capabilities, but it was harder to develop on than the new PlayStation. Without tools or documentation available, Saturn games took longer to make, and fewer third-party developers supported the platform. When it became obvious that Sony was taking the lead, Sega's corporate personality changed. It became very political, with lots of finger-pointing around the company. Sega tried to get a handle on the situation, but they made a lot of mistakes and ultimately STI was swallowed up in the corporate turmoil. Our separate protected status began to crumble. Virtually all of the senior management in America left.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

1992 STI

» The antithesis to Nintendo's *Mario* games, *Sonic 2* was quite possibly the greatest game on the Mega Drive. Speedy, colourful and with an emphasis on fun over challenge, *Sonic 2* was the perfect embodiment of everything Sega did best. The addition of Tails the fox, a two-player co-op mode and stunning psuedo-3D bonus stages made this far superior to the first *Sonic* and easily STI's greatest achievement. 15 years on, Sega still hasn't bettered it. **96%**



KID CHAMELEON

1992 STI

» STI's games were famed within Sega for their original character design and *Kid Chameleon* was no exception. In fact, there was so much character in the game that the main protagonist constantly changed his appearance depending on which hat he had collected during his adventure. Each hat bestowed him with a different special power, making for a title that felt like several different platform games rolled into one. **85%**



SONIC SPINBALL

1993 STI

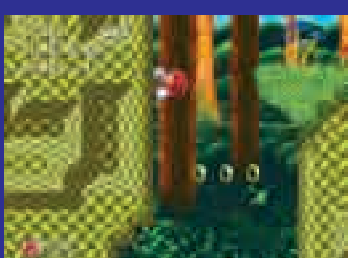
» Although critically savaged at the time of release, *Sonic Spinball* is actually a highly imaginative pinball game that makes good use of the *Sonic* licence. Each level is made up of several pinball tables slotted together, forming a labyrinthine pinball puzzle that requires both a mastery of the flippers and a few classic platforming skills. Anyone who dismissed this as a cynical cash-in the first time around should give it a second chance, it's a fantastic pinball game. **85%**



SONIC 3

1994 STI

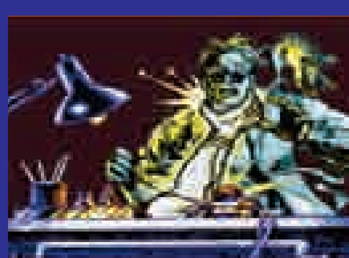
» *Sonic 3* is an odd game. Although it was developed by a team that was much closer to the original Sonic team than on *Sonic 2*, it is arguably inferior to both titles. The gameplay and visuals became more complex than in previous instalments. Sonic didn't look right and the increased number of switches and pulleys detracted from the speed-run feel of classic versions. It was still enjoyable but didn't capture the magic that made the first two feel so special. **80%**



SONIC & KNUCKLES

1994 STI

» STI's final *Sonic* game felt much more balanced than *Sonic 3* and came very close to recapturing the grace and style of *Sonic 2*. Being able to play as either Sonic or Knuckles added a sense of variety to the game but it was the cartridge's unique ability to physically link to previous *Sonic* titles that made *Sonic & Knuckles* awesome. Playing as Knuckles in *Sonic 2* and *3* brought new life into the old games, if you already had the cartridges, of course. **88%**



COMIX ZONE

1995 STI

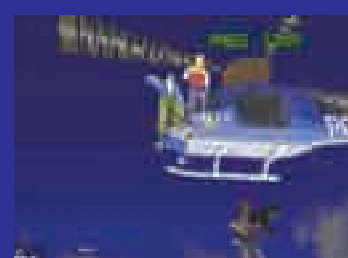
» Everyone should play *Comix Zone*. The scrolling beat-'em-up is completely original and is still an essential Mega Drive game. Moving through the pages of a comic book while fighting off enemies that are drawn right before your eyes is one of the most unforgettable experiences in gaming. The original MD cartridge even came bundled with an exclusive soundtrack CD, featuring re-recorded rock renditions of the in-game tunes. **92%**



THE OOZE

1995 STI

» The ultra-rare Japanese release of *The Ooze* will set you back far too much cash; however, it is, thankfully, available on loads of retro compilations and is sure to hit Virtual Console later this year. Fans of *The Chaos Engine* will love it as the top-down gameplay feels very similar, except, of course, that you play as a morphing blob of toxic waste... with a face. *The Ooze* is one of those little-known 16-bit gems that are well worth taking the effort to play through. **86%**



DIE HARD ARCADE

1996 STI/AM1

» Scrolling beat-'em-ups never really survived the transition to 3D. Classics such as *Streets Of Rage* and *Golden Axe* fell by the wayside, with few new titles making an impact, except for *Die Hard Arcade*. The coin-op hit, known as *Dynamite Deka* in Japan, was deeper than it appeared, allowing myriad combination moves to be used by those who took the time to learn its subtleties. This would have been a classic with or without the Bruce Willis likeness. **91%**


» The title screen to *Sonic & Knuckles* featured impressive rendered animation.

"SEGA WAS IN RAPID DECLINE AT THAT TIME AND THINGS WERE PRETTY CHAOTIC. WE [MORAWIEC AND STEPHENS] STUCK IT OUT UNTIL LATE 1996"
PETER MORAWIEC

For me, it was no longer fun to work there, the magic was gone, and it became obvious it was time to leave. The new management did not have the same vision… so they eventually shut down STI." Peter Morawiec, designer of *Comix Zone*, shares similar sentiments, "Sega was in rapid decline at that time and things were pretty chaotic. We [Morawiec and Stephens] stuck it out until late 1996 at which point we left to form Luxoflux."

Quietly, with little fanfare, the STI was shut down somewhere around 1996/1997 as Sega shifted focus back to its internal studios. Few gamers mourned its passing, although few realised it even existed to begin with. Only *Comix Zone* and *The Ooze* ever bore the STI logo, and just one of those ever saw a US release. Nevertheless, the ex-STI employees Retro Gamer has spoken to all look back fondly at their time at the institute. "It was a strange period of my life", recalls Stephens. "Peter and I would work very odd hours at times – going home at four in the morning was not unusual, and all-nighters were pretty frequent. There was a strong sense of camaraderie amongst the core team that has persisted to this day. I look back on those days fondly, but


» Underrated and often dismissed, *Sonic Spinball* is much better than you might think.

I'd never want to do it again." Morawiec agrees: "STI was a fun place to be at back then, full of colourful characters. The sales of the Genesis were booming and Sega of America was growing very rapidly. There were ups and downs, but overall I have very fond memories of the team and my five years with STI."

Roger Hector, meanwhile, chooses to look back at the way the STI's unorthodox organisation was both beneficial to Sega and the industry as a whole. "There is no doubt in my mind that the business model of STI was unique and extremely beneficial to Sega. For a few years, we were able to successfully address the needs of highly creative and talented people, and the needs of a big business. STI was extremely profitable, and *Sonic* became a $Billion property for Sega. STI attracted some of the best people from around the world. And even though we worked hard, it was a fun place to be. All entertainment development requires a unique creative vision, and real talent, and a dedicated work ethic. It prospers best in a sensitive and specialized business environment that is able to understand all the needs, and strike the balance. It doesn't happen very often, but when it all comes together… it's magic."

Now, around a decade after the Institute was shut down, the work of Sega's unique studio is only just beginning to receive the credit it deserved. Sega of Japan seems to take every possible opportunity to showcase the works of STI, as many of its games have appeared as extras on recent *Sonic* compilations, as well as the *Mega Drive Collection* and on the Wii's Virtual Console. Whilst, perhaps more importantly, Sega is once again realising the potential benefit in using talent outside of Japan and is opening new external studios such as the British-based Sega Driving Studio. Now only time will tell if such companies can harness the same kind of magic the Sega Technical Institute did so long ago.


» *Sonic 3* features a redesigned Sonic sprite that looks unlike his other incarnations.



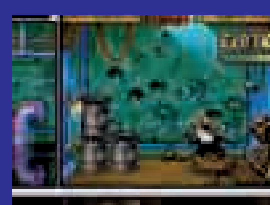
AVOID LIKE THE PLAGUE

Greendog: The Beached Surfer Dude (Mega Drive, 1992)

Although it's not a particularly bad game, *Greendog* is easily the STI's worst. As a 16-bit *Pitfall!* clone, it immediately felt regressive and also suffered from poor character design. We wouldn't literally avoid it like the plague but it's not something we'll be playing any time soon either.

SONIC'S SECRET ORIGINS

Retro Gamer was recently lucky enough to meet Yojiro Ogawa, the designer of *Sonic And The Secret Rings*, who happily spoke about his favourite Mega Drive games, both of which were developed by the STI. One favourite, *Sonic 2*, is of particular importance as its special stages, where Sonic and Tails run headlong into the screen, bear a striking resemblance to the way *Secret Rings* plays. Ogawa also explained that he personally made sure that *Comix Zone* was included on the *Sonic Mega Collection*, as it was a game he liked very much. The connection between the two? *Comix Zone* was designed by Peter Morawiec – the same man who had drawn the special stages in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*. Even a decade after its demise it seems that the Sega Technical Institute continues to have a profound effect on the development of *Sonic*.



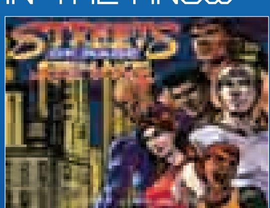
THE RE-MAKING OF...

STREETS OF RAGE



For the beat-'em-up fraternity, the streets are at their most desirable when populated by an army of criminals, wrongdoers, reprobates, delinquents and all manner of ne'er-do-wells. The boys at Bomber Games agree, and four years ago, they set about enraging the streets once again by completely re-imagining Sega's celebrated fighting trilogy.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** BOMBER GAMES
» **RELEASED:** 2007
» **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** FREE

You may recall back in issue 27 we featured the beta demo of *Streets Of Rage Remake* as our Retro Remake of the Month. Well, since then, we've been in constant contact with the Bomber Games crew and have followed their progress closely (check out last month's review). The full remake of Sega's most popular fighting franchise has been a long time coming, but as anyone who's played the game will testify, it was worth every minute.

ONE MAN'S MISSION

Spanish born programmer and founder of the concept, Eduard Luna Bolaño (you may know him as Bomberlink) is the driving force behind this new episode in the immortal series. "The idea came to me at the beginning of 2003. It was clear there was little or no chance of a new *SOR* game, so I decided it was up to me to create the next chapter in the saga. I wanted to make





» Although this brand new enemy character looks a bit like Axel, his name is Cody. I wonder if he'll win in the final fight?

"I COUPLED TOGETHER THE BEST I SAW OF EACH ONE: A CONCEPT THAT TOOK ME ALMOST A WHOLE YEAR TO DEVELOP!" EDUARD LUNA BOLAÑO



» "There are many Easter eggs in the game: nods to Sega, *Sonic*, an *Outrun* arcade cabinet, the team, some graffiti… and maybe the most important for me is the game greets me on my birthday!" – Bomberlink.



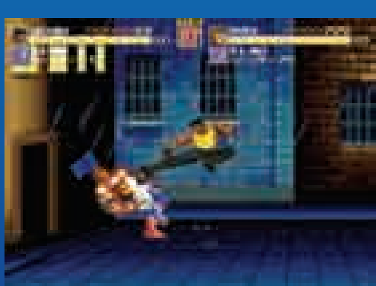
» Max's new running animation is based on Zangief from *Street Fighter Alpha*.



» "While I was developing the tiles engine I also had to create some very useful tools like this complete animation software package, FPGPE." – Bomberlink.

a new game that would have the same nostalgic look and gameplay as *SOR,* and at the same time include brand new features that would refresh the concept and give fans something different to enjoy," explains Bolaño, expressing his passion for Sega's original trilogy.

"The most difficult task was to recapture the "playfulness" of all three *Streets Of Rage* games at the same time, which actually vary quite a lot. I didn't want to keep one particular style, so I coupled together the best I saw of each one: a concept that took me almost a whole year to develop!" The notion of recreating old games for modern formats is as – if not more – prevalent than the spate of TV and film remakes which have saturated the cinema in recent years, but Bomber Games' intention not to simply rewrite the game verbatim, but to further develop it, is the injection of new life those classics need to catch the eye of today's increasingly fickle audience.



» Flag Mode is an unlockable one-on-one feature, where two players battle to hold onto the flag longest!

"I started work by myself, and it wasn't until a very early beta version was released that anyone else came on board. I never imagined there would be so many people involved in the final project, let alone the huge number of people following the development on the forums!" he laughs. "It's very gratifying to see people get so genuinely interested in your work, but ultimately that's what gives you the strength to continue."

Indeed, the Bomber Games forum has gathered an impressive, lively and healthy membership of what has unquestionably become the lynchpin of contemporary *Streets Of Rage* fandom. Even during the long, often silent, gaps between beta releases, the forum members have been consistently active and enthusiastic; feeding hungrily off every morsel of information from the *Remake* team. In return, forumites have showered the hobbyist developers with encouragement, advice, enthusiasm and, most importantly, the reassurance that after their years of hard work, there will be a grateful multitude of impassioned people waiting to play the game.

OUT ON THE TILES

These days, home-brew development tools are plenty and bountiful, but as Eduard explains, there's really no substitute for starting from scratch. "Although its sounds odd, *SOR Remake* was born from an engine used to create tiles for the game map. After that, I dedicated myself to ripping sounds from the original games to mount a basic menu and when I made a decision to go ahead with the project fully, I began to rip Axel so I could mount the first character inside the engine I'd created. That engine remains intact even today, and I'm very satisfied that *SOR Remake* is still 100 per cent its own code."

As with all great achievements, the bulk of the work is behind the scenes and when done properly, no one is even aware the work was done at all. But as Bomberlink says, the results of his preparation speak for themselves in the fluidity of the finished game.

"You can really appreciate the technical improvements we were able to make. The levels now carry more scroll layers and are much more colourful, there's much more variety of sound effects and improved aspects like the character's running and diagonal movements. Of course, we added a few new features, too!" Not least of those new features is one of the most audacious and difficult tasks the team could have set themselves: the reinstatement of one of the original trio from *Streets Of Rage,* Adam Hunter.

PROGRAMMING & GAME DESIGN

BOMBERLINK

GRAPHIC DESIGN
BOMERLINK
NIGHTWOLF
ADRIMUS
SHYNING
JIGSAW

LEVEL DESIGN
BOMERLINK
SHINOBI

ILLUSTRATIONS & ARTWORK
ARTH
KIWI

SOUNDTRACK
GECKO YAMORI
B-A-C

ADDITIONAL MUSIC
KALETH
SANCHIZMO
GROOVEMASTER303

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT
XWOLF
FERMINHO

STREETS OF RAGE



» The classic, unlockable reward from bygone beat-'em-ups: the one-on-one battle mode. Smashin'!



» Volleyball Mode does exactly what it says on the tin and, quite surprisingly, works really well! A spiffing mini-game reward for successful Ragers!

THE SOUND OF THE STREETS

Following on from renowned game maestros like Yuzo Koshiro is no small task, yet Swedish musician Daniel Bärlin (AKA Gecko Yamori) has put together a composition more than worthy of carrying on the Japanese artist's admirable work. "I'd already established a good reputation as a *SOR* remixer at Overclocked Remix, so I guess that's why I was approached by Bomber Games to work on *Remake*." Daniel told us. "I immediately saw the potential in the project and hooked up. Little to nothing is taken from the actual games; all the music is recreated from scratch. Usually this starts with sequencing the chorus or some other recognizable part, then building around that. I'm very proud of the genuine Nineties feel I've accomplished in most of the tracks. I believe this is what Yuzo Koshiro truly intended them to sound like." Special mention must go to the Prodigy reference during the bike chase, and the fantastic *Kill Bill* homage heard during the final battle with Mr. X.



» Dr Zan's electric on the dancefloor! Download the wicked Remake soundtrack here: http://www.doulifee.com/StreetofRage/index.php

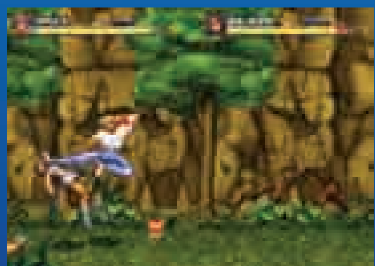


» Adam Hunter from *Streets Of Rage 1* in comparison with his renovated *Remake* graphics.

THE EVE OF ADAM

"Adam was a character that was lost in the sequels," begins Bolaño, "and I knew from the very beginning that he was a vital necessity for the remake. We couldn't compile and improve the three Sega games without bringing Adam back. The hardest thing was to recreate him using the new style of *Streets Of Rage 2*. Four of our team members worked on that problem for a long time."

This was the kind of critical sticking point that could cause such a project to fall by the wayside. Adam, the elder brother of Eddie "Skate" Hunter from the sequel, couldn't easily be excluded from a game which promised to reintroduce every other character – including all enemies – from the original titles, yet none of the design work needed to recreate him had ever been done.



» An early screen shot of the first alpha test release of *Streets Of Rage Remake*.

The Bomber Games team had very little to work with; the differences between the character designs of the original game and the two sequels were vast. Josef Axner (a graphic artist on the project, AKA Jigsaw) is most responsible for the reinvention of Adam Hunter and told us how he approached the job.

"This job was one of my major motivations for joining the project." Axner explains. "When designing the new sprites for Adam, I had to keep true to his appearance in *SOR1*, but I also knew I wouldn't be able to stray too far from the way Axel looked and moved. However, I was concerned about Adam being his own character, so I made sure to never simply repaint Axel's sprite, and I didn't hesitate to take liberties if it meant him being more unique."

The different playable characters from the first *SOR* title were, it has to be said, mostly identical – a significant flaw in a game which was designed to compete with Nintendo's impending conversion of the arcade smash, *Final Fight*. Axner's intention to fully endow Adam with individual characteristics is a testament to Axner and the dedication of the project as a whole.

HIDDEN IN SMALL DETAILS

From the very first menu, there's no doubt whatsoever this is classic *Streets Of Rage* through and through: every punch, sound, sprite and nuance is saturated with precisely the same slick gameplay and superb retro-iconic design that made the original trilogy so memorable. But go back to your Mega Drive for a shot on *Streets Of Rage 2* for an hour and it becomes clear just how much the Bomber Games crew have added to the formula. Alongside the reinstatement of Adam, there are a plethora of new features that were impossible (or prohibitively impractical) 15 years ago.

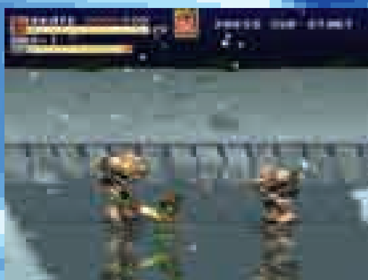


» "There are about 45 levels now, with around 70 % rescued from *SOR*. The others are brand new levels with things not seen before." – Bomberlink.

Connoisseurs of the previous games will be aware of an unusual anomaly from deep within the *Streets Of Rage 3* cartridge: an unused, high-speed motorbike chase. Much of the character graphics and level designs were present in the cartridge ROM, though only accessible by way of an Action Replay hack, and even then incomplete. Since Sega never shed any light on this unused level, Bomber Games felt it was up to them, as Eduard Bolaño explains.

"A lot of things were unknown to me about *Streets Of Rage* before getting





» Check out the wicked reflection effect in the floor of the snowy mountain level. It's worth noticing the character's shadows are now accurate, too.



» Alongside the usual weapons there are a few guns lying around for our heroes.



» The screen blitz from Axel, Blaze and Adam's trigger-happy buddies on the force from *Streets Of Rage 1* has been revamped and reinstated.



» All six characters from the three previous games are playable, with another two to unlock. But which two?!



» Due to all the lighting effects, this disco level was the hardest one to program according to Bomberlink, not least because Ash makes an ostentatious appearance. And look! Axel's got wood!





» Blaze goes upside Storm's head in the superbly reinstated motorbike level, and Donovan discovers the effects of inertia when his truck rear ends a lorry!



» *Remake* now allows the CPU to control player two, granting that fantastic co-operative gameplay even if you're a Billy-No-Mates. I'll hold 'im, you hit 'im!

"I WAS ALWAYS CONCERNED ABOUT ADAM BEING HIS OWN CHARACTER, SO I MADE SURE TO NEVER SIMPLY REPAINT AXEL'S SPRITE" JOSEF AXNER.

deep into it, and the most intriguing was to see some of the motorcycle stages that weren't used in the third game. Only an enemy was extracted from the original ROM; the motorbikes were new sprites since there was no way to get them, and all the scenery is new."

And it wasn't just a case of dissecting the *Streets Of Rage* trilogy. Known as *Bare Knuckle* in Japan, there were a good deal of minor changes made by Sega when it came to taming the game for a more prudish Western audience. Several scantily clad sprites had their shame covered up, and *BK3*'s flamboyantly fashionable end of level boss, Ash, was removed completely. But no more.

"We collected a lot of material from *Bare Knuckle 3*." Bomberlink says. "Ash makes an appearance in a club, and the *BK3* versions of Blaze, Electra and Garnet are back too. Details like the broken warehouse door on Stage 4 come from *BK3* as well."

It's not at all unreasonable to say the *Remake* "plays" like *Streets Of Rage 3*, while "looking" like *Streets Of Rage 2*, an amalgam that most fans will agree harnesses the strongest features of the two original sequels. And at the end of 2006, agree they did.

HITTING THE STREETS

New Year's Eve took on an entirely different feeling for the hundreds of Bomber Games members as intense anticipation permeated the forum. Uncontrollably eager gamers fired random thoughts at one another, too excited to sit quietly.

At 3:17 AM on 1 January 2007 (16 years to the day since the US release of the first *Streets Of Rage* title), the game was uploaded and ready for the rabid fans to clamour for download bandwidth. People went without sleep and missed New Years celebrations for the game they'd been waiting over three years to play. But they weren't the only ones. Eduard had been at his computer all day trying to keep his promised deadline.

"At the end, part of the team was absent and there were problems regarding the enemy sprites. I found I had incomplete or badly ripped sets when I was finishing some enemies' moves, so I lost a lot of time ripping and fixing those sets, and had to keep the testing to a minimum. Every Jet version, Mona and Lisa and Mr. X were done only two hours before uploading the game!" laughs Bolaño, looking back fondly at those frenzied hours at the end of the year, but clearly relieved the game made it there on time.

By 3:22 AM, the first call went up on the forum that the download had completed, and the wait was over. Virtual applause for the sheer professional excellence have echoed across the internet since 3AM on 1 January, and are still resounding today. The Bomber Games crew have much to be proud of.

"It's had an incredible reaction. There was so much excitement and people were unbelievably enthusiastic. I love playing it myself and it satisfies me to know I've overcome such a great challenge," says Bolaño. And as he sees the breadth of his domain, which world will he conquer next?

"Right now I'm taking a rest, but I plan to continue polishing the game in the future. Having people testing it on such a massive scale has helped me understand how to improve it. There's a new game mode complete and we plan to start testing an online feature. There's an Xbox port in the works and a PSP version is a possibility, but our priority is simply for the players already out there to have fun. I'd like to ask them all to come by the forums, say hello and tell us what they think of our game!"

Bomber Games, I salute you once again.

PICTURE THIS

In true retro-Sega style, *Streets Of Rage Remake* awards successful gamers with a gallery of game related artwork. Swedish web designer and illustrator on the project, David Rubarth (AKA Arth), told us how he put stylus to tablet.

"I'd made a short *SOR2* prologue comic and posted it at the old Bomber Games forum. Bomberlink saw it and asked me to help out. I used the old cutscene artwork for inspiration and style reference, but all my work is new. I love pixel art and as the game is in 320x240 resolution, I've drawn most of the illustrations in low-res. There's something special about old time 2D graphics and it's very challenging to draw with a limited palette and canvas size. You can't simply draw something in high-res and scale it down. Also, it needs to be recognizable in a small window and at the same time look good in full screen."

David would like to dedicate his work to *SOR2*'s glorious illustrator, Tomoharu Saito, who tragically passed away on 29 June 2006 at only 38-years-old.



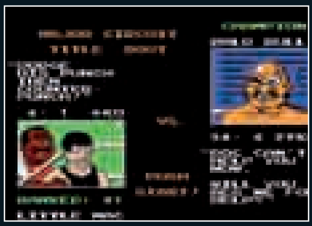
» Tomoharu Saito: 1968 - 2006.

PUNCH-OUT!!

There is nothing more heartening then seeing an unlikely hero triumph over arduous odds – a notion never so passionately demonstrated than by a brave, pint-sized boxer who went under the unfortunate moniker Little Mac







» Yeah, nice advice, Doc. Now hows about calling me a real doctor?

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **GENRE:** SPORT (BOXING)
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3+

This year saw a controversial return to the ring for Rocky Balboa, in a fight that pitted the fibrous veteran against a younger, technically superior opponent. Chicken chasing, meat pounding and inspiring fanfare aside, the film poses the question: if you took two heavyweight fighters, from two different eras, who would prove victorious? So what would happen if you pitted the former Eighties videogame champ *Punch-Out!!* against a new breed of boxing brawlers? Cue montage.

Back in 1984, Nintendo released an innovative arcade boxing game called *Punch-Out!!*. Its cartoon tale about a transparent pugilist working his way up through a rank of oddball fighters quickly attracted droves of sleeve-scrunching loafer-wearers into neon-lit arcades everywhere. It was conceivable, then, that Nintendo's grey toaster would host its own version of the game and in 1987 a NES sequel was released.

The home version sported a number of startling differences from its cabinet prequel. The arcade's modest roster of six fighters had been increased to 11, spanning 14 bouts over three circuits and most noticeably, the transparent wireframe fighter had been replaced with a pathetic 17-year-old kid, who looked in dire need of some sunlight.

There's a distinct Stallone-esque scene in the game, which shows the eager fighter running beside his puffy-cheeked trainer, Doc Louis. The trainer is perched on a bike, trying to coax his pink-suited calcium kid into full fitness. It's a subtle sequence which personifies *Punch-Out!!*: a humorous pastiche of an underdog story, with a nod to Eighties pop culture.

The first opponent you face is the gangly orange-haired Frenchman, Glass Joe. He awkwardly bounds and squawks around the mat like a startled llama, looking uncomfortable in his surroundings and rather unsure of his undersized opponent. Beside him stands a familiar face, dressed in unfamiliar attire. Playing a cameo referee is an older, portlier looking Mario. He is donning a bow tie and winkle-pickers, and beneath his nose sits his trademark moustache, and on his brow winks that very famous red flat-cap.

Mario calls the fight and you begin. The first thing that you will notice is the lack of freedom and attacks at Mac's disposal. Five punches: two low body blows, two uppercuts, and one special spinning



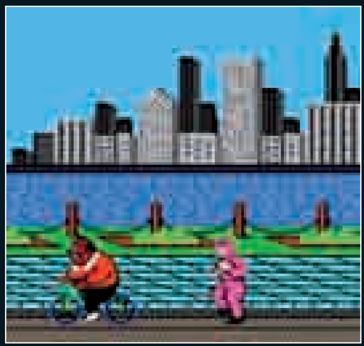
» Glass Joe looks weary on his feet after a devastating blow from the little man.



» Another easy win for the thunderous Little Mac. Does he load cement into those gloves?



» A cutting left jab by Mac sends Tom Jones' mouth guard into his tonsils.



» Mac's mum accidentally put a red sock in the washing machine again.

MIKE TYSON'S BLOW OUT

Nintendo actually released two versions of *Punch-Out!!* on the NES, distinguishable by their final bosses. The game was initially released in 1987 as *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* and had Little Mac face the lobe-loving rebel in a dream match-up for his heavyweight title. However, in 1990 another version of the brawler was released, omitting Tyson from the game and replacing him with the soppy sounding, Mr Dream. Although the new champion looked poles apart from Iron Mike, he inherited all of his trademark moves. The theories surrounding the reasons for the switch included the boxer's media-masticated image and his high-profile run-in with the law. The genuine reason was less exciting however, involving a contract dispute and loss of title. The game franchise has since had one other incarnation, *Super Punch-Out!!* on the Super Nintendo, which, oddly, dropped the character of Little Mac and saw a return of the transparent perspective adopted by the arcade game.



haymaker. But with only a sparse number of buttons with which to call commands, what do you expect? Thankfully, the small arsenal of moves you do have work a charm and it's these damage-dealing deficiencies that help make the fights immediately engulfing. Crucially, the punches feel solid and proficient in rattling loose teeth – a vital sensation for any boxing game that's worth its weight in blood, sweat and tears. Certain aspects of the sport are lacking in the game; you can't bounce around the ring, taunt an opponent, or trap a fighter against the ropes. The boxing presented here is stripped of its gloves, and fought with basic bare knuckles.

All of the opponents that Little Mac must face look suspiciously out of his weight class, so he must muster brains as well as brawn, and tempt each fighter to expose their weak spot to take control of the fight. Each opponent follows a strict routine of jabs which eventually open up their defence, and with it your chance of victory. Ironically, progressing far in *Punch-Out!!* doesn't rest on how many punches you throw, but rather the timing in which you throw them. Anticipating your opponent's punch pattern and pre-empting a nasty head pounding is what gets you a shot at the heavyweight title, a notion emphasised during the intermitting round breaks. Rather then copper pennies or cotton wool buds being pressed against Mac's cuts and swells, Doc's modest remedy is a subtle pat on the back, coupled with stern advice on how best to topple the stronger opponent. Your part in this role was to increase the tempo of Doc's patting by tapping select, unravel his cryptic riddles, and utilise them in the ring.

ANTICIPATING YOUR OPPONENT'S PUNCH PATTERN AND PRE-EMPTING A NASTY HEAD POUNDING IS WHAT GETS YOU A SHOT AT THE HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE

The fights are split into three rounds lasting three minutes each and many of the matches will be won by technical knockout. One thing you should keep a keen eye on during each round is the state of Mac's stamina – displayed by the heart meter – which will diminish from absorbing heavy blows and throwing messy, missed swings.

Punch-Out!! always had personality standing proudly in its corner. Every combatant seemed strikingly iconic, and cleverly their idiosyncrasies seemed to play both to their strengths and their weaknesses. Case in point, one of the later opponents, King Hippo, is grossly oversized, and a heavy blow from his flabby fist will send Mac's health plummeting rapidly. However, find his weighty weak spot – a plaster-covered bellybutton, and one knock down is all it takes to end the fight, as the majestic gastropod proves too heavy to get back up onto his feet.

There is no question whatsoever that boxing games have evolved dramatically since the release of Nintendo's punchy 8-bit brawler. Gone are the button-bashing jabs, the hazardous haymakers and the thumb-splitting action of trying to frantically raise a floored fighter to his feet. A new breed of fighter exhibits a foreign formula and battles with a deadly stance broken with analogue commands, offering a greater level of control. In true *Rocky* style, this bloody clash has gone to the score cards: there is just no separating these two gallant fighters. Both demonstrate the finest virtues of the sport. There goes the final bell… ending a fight that was just too close to call.



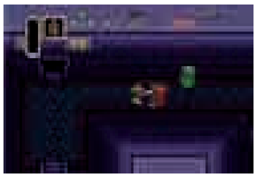
» It looks as though Russia's Von Kaiser catches a nasty low blow to his Kalashnikov!

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST
SYSTEMS: SNES, GBA, VIRTUAL CONSOLE
YEAR: 1991

SUPER MARIO BROS
SYSTEMS: NES
YEAR: 1985

DONKEY KONG
SYSTEMS: NES
YEAR: 1983





DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



THE WIZARDS OF OZ

HE MAY HAVE ONLY EVER PLAYED CHESS ON HIS COMPUTER, BUT ALFRED MILGROM, FOUNDER OF MELBOURNE HOUSE, KNEW GAMES WERE SET TO BE HUGE. AND IN CREATING INFLUENTIAL AUSTRALIAN DEVELOPER BEAM SOFTWARE, HE ENSURED HE WAS AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE INDUSTRY, AS DAVID CROOKES DISCOVERS IN THE FIRST OF A SPECIAL TWO-PART SERIES…

IN BRIEF

Alfred Milgrom sets up a publishing company with four friends in Australia in 1972. Six years later he moves to London to form a new publisher, Melbourne House. Increasingly homesick, he returns to Melbourne and sets up Beam Software, inspired by Clive Sinclair's ZX80. With a string of adventure games including *The Hobbit*, Beam becomes hugely successful. And then *Way Of The Exploding Fist* arrives, propelling the firm to the top. Yet its Golden period during the Eighties is threatened when Melbourne House experiences financial difficulties.

IT'S EARLY DECEMBER in 1980 and William Tang is alone in someone else's living room. He taps on a computer keyboard for a moment or so, gets caught up in what he is doing and sets about his business of writing some software. Watching over him are Alfred Milgrom and Naomi Besen. They have put their efforts into a new Australian company, Beam Software, and if that means giving up their lounge until Tang goes back to university in February, then so be it. Hey, it's cheap after all and it's not as if they have an alternative office to work from.

Ten months have passed since a homesick Milgrom was sitting in London, reading a copy of the Australian Financial Review, engrossed in an article about the start of game publishing in the US. The article had discussed titles such as chess and adventure games by Adventure International, and as he pored over ever word, Milgrom began to get excited. It was, he believed, time to act.

By this point, Milgrom and his then wife, Naomi, had been in Britain for two years, having moved to London to set up book publisher Melbourne House. Milgrom already had a strong publishing background: in 1972, upon completing a science degree at the University of Melbourne, he formed Outback Press with four friends in Australia. But during his time with Outback he realised the firm was being held back because many American publishers were reluctant to sell Australian rights to their titles. UK book publishing companies were simply unwilling to buy US licences that didn't include Australian rights and so were already sewing up the Australian market. Milgrom figured that by forming a publishing company with Naomi in the UK, he would be in a better position to



snap up both the UK and Australian rights to American books. But now he was realising he could branch out in a fresh direction and produce books with his own content. And the fledgling computer industry would be the perfect niche, particularly since Clive Sinclair was releasing the ZX80. The possibilities of entering this new market were just too vast to ignore.

Milgrom set to work. He says: "I had an idea to create a book called '30 Programs For The ZX80.' You see, at the very beginning the idea was not to develop software, but rather to develop content for computer books. You have to remember that our business and expertise was book publishing so our initial idea was to develop content that would satisfy the needs of computer users."

The book was published in September 1980 and to market it, Naomi contacted Clive Sinclair to obtain an endorsement. But Sinclair was too busy to take the call. "I don't think he had even had time to look at the book," says Milgrom. "But after many repeated calls from Naomi, he told his secretary to say that the book was excellent. "We then took this, and ran ads for the book in the computer magazines quoting: 'This book is excellent. – Clive Sinclair.' It sold pretty well."

Within a couple of months, Milgrom and Besen decided to move back to Australia. Taking the first two initials from his wife's surname and combining it with his own initials, Alfred Milgrom formed Beam Software with the intention of continuing to produce computer publications which would be published by Melbourne House in London.

To help create new software for the books, they decided to hire staff and soon brought in the first person to be employed by Beam. Milgrom recalls: "When Naomi and I returned to Australia, we did not yet have an office or any employees so I very quickly started searching for someone to help develop content. That's when William Tang came to work for us. He started in December and stayed until the end of his vacation in February. But he continued to work with us during his studies and for many years afterwards."

Milgrom then had a brainwave. "I began to think more about the concept of publishing," he says. "I realised that there was very little difference between developing material and putting that content onto paper or putting that content on a cassette tape." Beam became a computer game developer, its games would go on to be published by sister company Melbourne House. They became the two most important game companies ever to kangaroo-hop from Australia to the world stage.

Not only were they in the right place at the right time – "the Sinclair ZX80 was launched with no software or books for people who bought it", says Milgrom – they also became synonymous with quality games. And Milgrom had the pick of Australian computer talent. Tang's arrival at Beam allowed the firm to start work on getting the best out of the ZX80 and Milgrom wanted to develop a game written entirely in machine code. Since the ZX80 only allowed BASIC programs to be loaded, Tang had to enter the code as hex in a REM statement. Without delving too deep into the technical side, the result of this work was the development of a version of *Space Invaders* for the ZX80, which was ready by March 1981. Misfortune struck, however. Milgrom says: "I arranged to

WORKING FOR BEAM

Programmer Ian Malcolm says his first day at Beam was a mixture of excitement, nervousness and a dream-like feeling. But what was it like working there? "Alfred Milgrom was very hands on and tended to run things from the top down, taking care of the business side. He'd go to trade shows and make deals but also did things like interviewing and hiring staff. He was effectively producer on numerous projects – a mixed blessing. Seemingly arbitrary design changes would come from nowhere, and he had a habit of turning up at programmers' desks unexpectedly and expecting to be shown something impressive. But he was willing to give people a shot at different things if they believed they could do it. As for Naomi, in the 13 or so years I worked there, on and off, I probably saw her once a year or less. Her involvement in a hands-on or development sense was effectively zero."

"SYNONYMOUS WITH QUALITY, BEAM SOFTWARE AND MELBOURNE HOUSE BECAME THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT GAME COMPANIES TO EMERGE FROM AUSTRALIA"



» *Bazooka Bill* was a run-of-the-mill platformer, but it was made by Arcade, another Melbourne House division dedicated to producing shoot-'em-ups.

» Melbourne House picks up the top licence that is *Asterix*.

ADAM LANCMAN

In 1982, Adam Lancman joined Melbourne House/Beam as an in-house accountant. He had no previous knowledge or experience with computer games and his background was as an auditor with one of the big accounting firms. But he very quickly became interested in the computer game business and became an invaluable part of the Melbourne House/Beam team. As time went on, he became a shareholder and director in the business and eventually became the managing director of Beam Software. Alfred Milgrom says: "What Adam provided was much-needed extra depth to the management team. I think that, in retrospect, even with Adam Lancman on board it would be fair to say that we didn't have enough management expertise in the company. But Adam became the face of Beam Software to the industry, constantly going to meet with other people in the business. He would regularly spend three months of each year travelling away from Australia and his family. He was very passionate about the Australian computer games industry and was appointed president of the Game Developers' Association of Australia, where he worked tirelessly for all Australian development studios. It is a loss to the entire Australian games industry that Adam Lancman passed away last year."

fly to London to launch the game and promote the other titles we were developing. But the week that I arrived back in London was the week that Clive Sinclair announced the ZX81 machine. All of a sudden, no one was interested in our new product any more, even though the ZX80 was still in shops and still selling. This was a very important lesson for us. It made us realise that there was no set life for any particular machine, so the emphasis had to be on trying to develop products for each machine as quickly as possible. Also we learned that as soon as a new machine was announced, the sales of products for the old machine dropped dramatically."

In 1981, however, Milgrom obtained the licensing rights to *The Hobbit*. The firm had promised to release the book in conjunction with the game and it began developing what would become a new style of adventure game. Based on the novel by JRR Tolkien, *The Hobbit* computer game took around 18 months to write. It had around 50 locations and was released in 1982 on the Spectrum (later being ported to machines such as the CPC464, BBC Micro, Commodore 64, Oric and Dragon 32). It came with a copy of the book and had an advanced parser, which moved away from the simple verb-noun inputs of many other games.

In fact, *The Hobbit* made great use of 'Inglish', a successful attempt by programmer Stuart Ritchie to create an advanced parser. While rivals were content with parsers that allowed basic inputs such as 'get sword', *The Hobbit* catered for complex phrases, which could understand two or more commands and then act on them. Adverbs, pronouns and punctuation were also permitted and objects were categorised according to size and weight. Objects could be combined or damaged and the action took place in real time. If you left the machine while you nipped to the loo, you may have seen the message 'You wait – time passes' on the screen upon your return.

The Hobbit became the biggest selling Spectrum adventure of all time, a proud moment for the game's author, Philip Mitchell. He went on to create other adventures for Melbourne House, including *Sherlock Holmes*, a game that was delayed around four months since Mitchell had high standards and insisted that it was completed to his satisfaction before release.

At the same time, Melbourne House was continuing to publish computer books, producing titles like *Spectrum Hardware Manual* and *Spectrum Microdrive Book*. But as the popularity of the computer games soared, so the books began to take a back seat. "Book development is notoriously slow, with long lead times between the time the manuscript is finished and when the book is released," explains Milgrom. "This made it very difficult to develop interesting computer books when the lifetime of the computer models themselves was not easily predicted. In the early days of software publishing, games were also more profitable than books. So as computers became more popular, and games started outselling books, there was little incentive to keep the book business going."

Certainly, the games side was taking off. The arcade classic, *Penetrator*, became one of 1983's best selling Spectrum games and utilities such as Melbourne Draw proved a hit, showing a willingness for Milgrom's firm to branch into new areas. This was shown just as starkly with the 1984 release of the *High-Level User-Friendly Real-Time Games Designer*, or *HURG* for short. Things were looking good, and by this time the 12-strong team at Melbourne House UK had moved into the spacious ground floor of a new office block in Richmond, its gold-tinted windows giving the building a cutting-edge feel.

"Back then, the company was very laid back, though," says programmer Andrew Davie, who worked for Beam. "It was typical for people to be at the office around the clock, but programmers were generally late in – after 10am always, after 2pm often – but late to leave. Overnight sessions were not unheard of, and it was quite common to work until 10pm or 11pm."



» Take that! Another number one smash, *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* is one of the first 8-bit beat-'em-ups.

» *Doc The Destroyer* was a beautifully illustrated text adventure.



» *Hungry Horace*, programmed by William Tang and with graphics by Alfred Milgrom, was a great *Pac-Man* clone and one of the few Spectrum games available in ROM format.



This hard work was being well received. Reviews of Melbourne House's games were largely glowing, but the best was yet to come. While *The Hobbit* had given Melbourne House a firm footing in the market, it was karate simulation *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* in 1985 that would really capture people's imagination. Created for machines such as the Spectrum, Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC, this was one game that just could not fail.

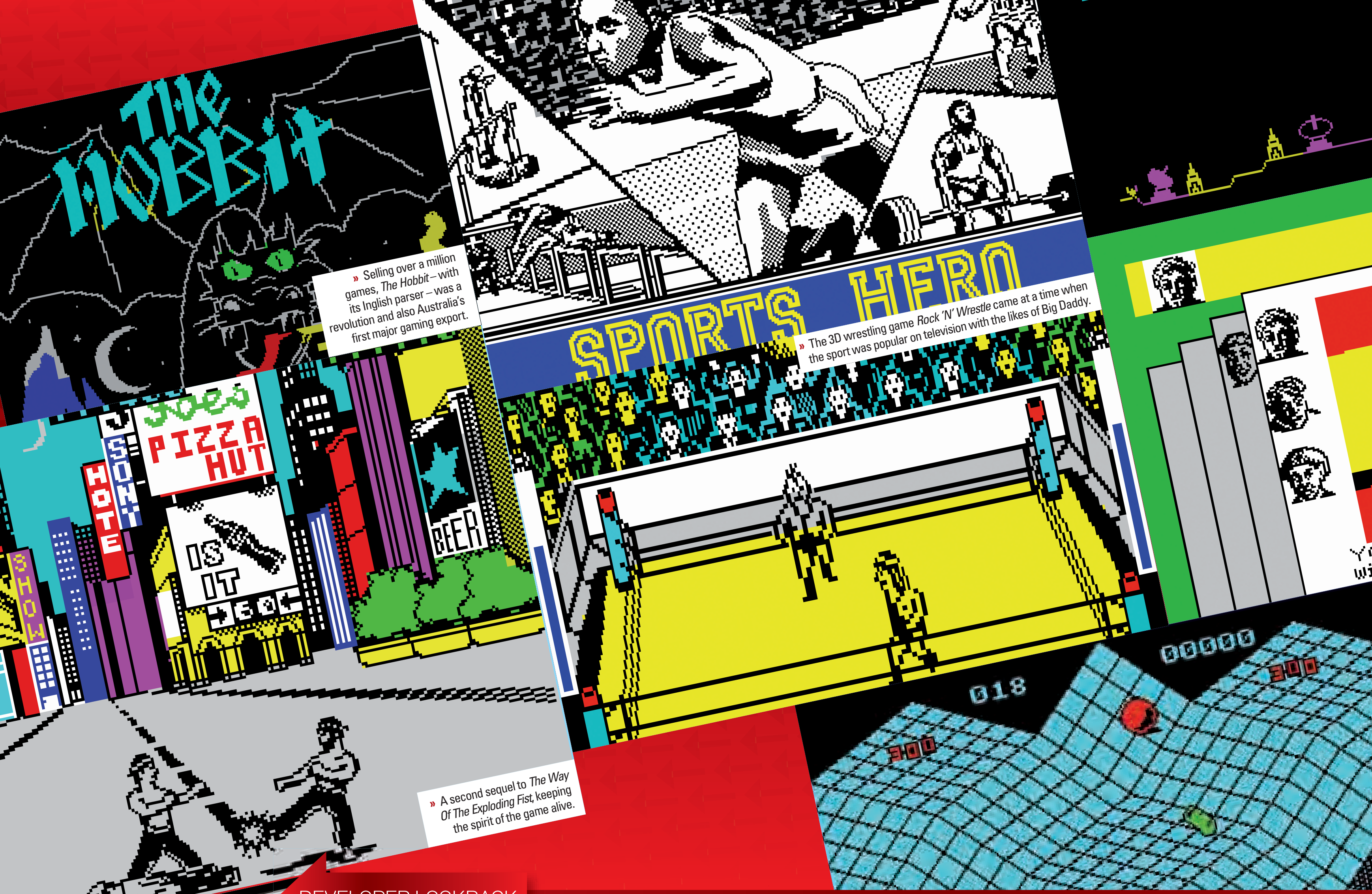
"The credit for *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* has to be given to Gregg Barnett," says Milgrom. "Gregg was our resident C64 expert – his initial work at Beam was the conversion of some of our successful Spectrum games to the C64, where they were not so successful. But Gregg came up with the idea of doing a karate game, and he had some definite ideas about how sports games should play. In my opinion, the two main reasons why *Exploding Fist* was so successful was because of the graphics and because of the way that Gregg programmed the user interaction. Instead of just mapping each joystick movement to a specific move, the move changed depending on which action you had just completed. This meant that there was immense fluidity to the game, and no matter which move the player chose, it looked good. Gregg worked very closely with the graphic artist Greg Holland as well to ensure that fluidity of movement. The other element of the user interaction was the artificial intelligence, and I think that the AI gave the player just the right blend of challenge and ability to win, although we under-estimated the power of low kick."

The game, regarded as the first one-on-one home beat-'em-up, sold more than 500,000 copies on the Commodore 64 alone and was number one in the European game charts. Gregg Barnett says: "I can still remember the day I did my first big compile and got what was effectively the two-player game working. Without telling anybody, I went to make a coffee, and when I came back there was a queue of people playing the game. That's when we all knew we had a potential hit."

Developer Beam and publisher Melbourne House were on a roll. In 1986, Beam had secured 10 per cent of the UK market. Games such as *Rock 'N' Wrestle*, the first home computer wrestling game, and the comic book styling of *Mugsy's Revenge* were critically acclaimed. *Mugsy's Revenge*, which pitted players as a gangster in 1919 making cash by illegally supplying alcohol during the Prohibition era in America, was programmer Davie's first game. "I was working on the C64 version and I was a bit out of my depth, as it had been a few months since I'd done assembler," he reveals. Alfred had ideas about what he wanted from the game and my job was basically to implement these as best I could given my skills at that stage. What made Melbourne House great, I think, was our ability to coax the machines to do things that other companies were unable to."

Games writer Paul Kidd also worked on *Mugsy's Revenge*. He recalls: "I was on the dole, masterfully equipped with a degree in Aztec religion and English Civil War history, when my fiancée found an advert looking for writers. "I got a freelance job, initially for *Mugsy's Revenge* then later *Doc The Destroyer*. At the time, the company had been working on *The Hobbit*, and suddenly found that it needed people capable of writing conversations, location descriptions and stuff like that. So I was just what the doctor

"THE HOBBIT GAVE MELBOURNE HOUSE A FIRM FOOTING, BUT WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST REALLY CAPTURED PEOPLE'S IMAGINATION"



» Selling over a million games, *The Hobbit* – with its Inglish parser – was a revolution and also Australia's first major gaming export.

» The 3D wrestling game *Rock 'N' Wrestle* came at a time when the sport was popular on television with the likes of Big Daddy.

» A second sequel to *The Way Of The Exploding Fist*, keeping the spirit of the game alive.



ordered." With the success of *The Hobbit* ringing in Beam's ears, Kidd was hired as a writer. "My first full-time job was doing location descriptions and dialogue for the *Fellowship Of The Ring* game. It has always been a favourite of mine because of the idiotic gameplay. You see, programmers put the games together, and programmers assumed that players were going to be logical. So after the game was released, I asked if I could actually play the game – and broke it in about 15 different ways in a single afternoon."

Yet with other major releases such as *Fist II: The Legend Continues*, it seemed things just could not go wrong. Programmer Graeme Scott says: "At the time, the firm was quite prolific, spending just six to eight months on projects, working in teams of between two and five people. I remember there were a lot of long hours and really tight deadlines but as it was my first job out of school I didn't know any better. I was doing something I always wanted to do so it didn't really matter."

He recalls how Milgrom would come up with a host of ideas for games – "not all of them were of any practical use," Scott laughs – and he would walk around the programmers every morning to see what the staff were doing. But then, in 1987, the company hit financial problems. Melbourne House sold its UK publishing arm and the name to Mastertronic, a publisher and distributor of budget games. Kidd says: "Naive as I was in those days, I thought it absurd that anyone would buy a name. For us at Beam it was just 'business as usual'."

The problem had set in around 1985 and 1986 when Melbourne House and Beam were trying to decide whether they should concentrate on game development or game publishing and distribution. Management resources were being stretched very thinly and the firms did not have the skills to run companies in both the UK and in Australia since they had different requirements and different approaches to the products. Melbourne House also faced major hurdles in trying to compete against distributors such as US Gold, which concentrated on the publishing and distribution functions. Melbourne House did not have its own distribution facilities and, because it only promoted its own titles, it only had a small number of sales representatives.

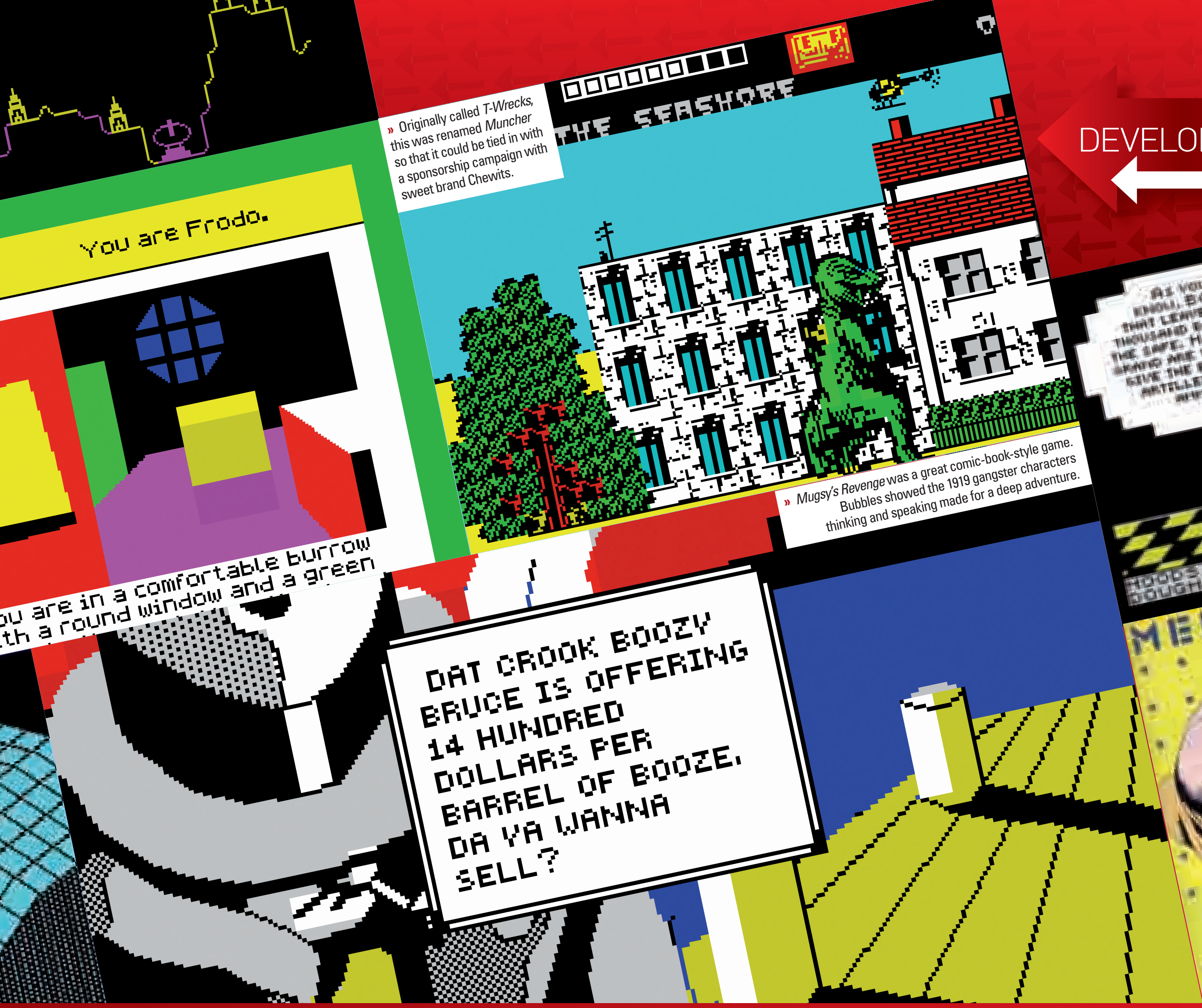
In 1985, Geoff Heath was employed as managing director to run Melbourne House from the UK but it still lacked the financial resources to set up its own distribution centre. But there was another problem. "It would also be fair to say that there was a personality and culture clash between Naomi Besen and I on one side and Geoff Heath on the other," says Milgrom. "Despite the success of *Way Of The Exploding Fist*, Melbourne House as a publisher had a limited forward list. It was limited to what titles Beam Software could develop and a few independent authors. We also had limited titles, limited financial resources and poor

WILLIAM TANG

Beam's first employee, William Tang, played a big part in the firm's success. He was noted for creating the *Horace* series which started in 1982 with *Pac-Man* clone *Hungry Horace* – published by Sinclair for Spectrum and Melbourne House for C64. It spawned two sequels: *Horace Goes Skiing* and the Spectrum-only platformer *Horace And The Spiders*. A fourth, *Horace To The Rescue*, was canned when Tang suffered a collapsed lung. He then went on to release *Way Of The Exploding Fist*, *Mugsy's Revenge* and *Asterix And The Magic Cauldron*. Alfred Milgrom says: "William was the first of many university students employed by us during their university vacations, who then came to work for us full time once they'd completed their studies. This was a system that benefited everyone because we were able to introduce the concepts of computer gaming – and the very different programming requirements involved – to computer science students. This was needed because there were no computer game programming classes."

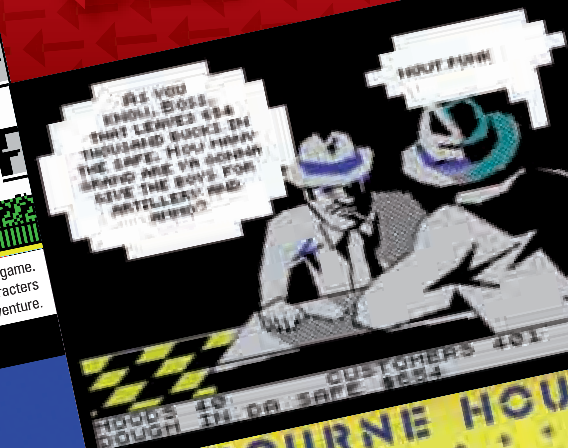


» By the time *Street Hassle* was released, Melbourne House had been taken over by Mastertronic.



» Originally called *T-Wrecks*, this was renamed *Muncher* so that it could be tied in with a sponsorship campaign with sweet brand Chewits.

» *Mugsy's Revenge* was a great comic-book-style game. Bubbles showed the 1919 gangster characters thinking and speaking made for a deep adventure.





» Just one of the many Melbourne House adverts placed in magazines.

management. So in 1986 we looked to sell Melbourne House and concentrate our resources on the development side: Beam Software. The match with Mastertronic seemed to be a good match. Mastertronic at that time concentrated only on budget titles, but wanted to have its own full-price list. This would enable them to have higher margins on the full-price titles as well as a ready-made source of future budget titles."

There was a slight problem for Beam, however. The developer had a difference of opinion with Mastertronic on occasion, something it had not previously faced when it was both the publisher and developer. Mastertronic wanted to make changes to some of the products Beam was developing, and it was not happy with some titles. The delays and rejections also meant Beam Software had less income than projected.

Yet despite all of that, Beam continued. It reverse engineered the Nintendo NES so it was beginning to create software for the new Japanese console. *Street Hassle*, for instance, was released on the format and Nintendo was so impressed, it gave Beam a developer licence. Andrew Davie, who met wife Ann at Melbourne House, says: "*Street Hassle* was basically a fun fighting game into which we just threw everything oddball we could think of. It was Fred's idea to bounce off the side of the screen, but the characters themselves came from anyone and everyone. I think it was a fun little game, and quite ironic that the same game on the NES was a complete dog." Nevertheless, Beam Software continued to be an independent games developer based in Australia, and even after the sale of Melbourne House it continued to grow as its staff expanded to 25, making it the biggest programming team outside Japan and the US.

Milgrom says: "As it happened, the sale of the Melbourne House business coincided with a change in the market for games in the UK. This was a time when the UK computers became less exciting – the sale of the Sinclair computer business to Amstrad was a key change, and the Nintendo NES console was making inroads into the US market. By a lucky coincidence, Beam Software had already been exploring and reverse engineering the NES and it became only the second non-Japanese company to develop games for it."

The computers were not ignored, however. *Exploding Fist +* was released, *T-Wrecks* got a Spectrum-only airing and the brilliant *Bedlam!* was unleashed. Then, it was learned that Mastertronic had hit severe cash flow problems because it had heavily committed itself to developing arcade games using a system based on Amiga technology. Called Arcadia Systems, this subsidiary was a flop since the games were quite poor. The only upshot was that Virgin bought Mastertronic and the firm became the Mastertronic Group. When it was later merged with Virgin Games, the name was changed to Virgin Mastertronic. Then a third change brought about Virgin Interactive Entertainment, and the Melbourne House brand – which Mastertronic had wanted back in 1987 – was being forgotten.

Beam, however, continued regardless and began to flourish into the Nineties. Milgrom comments: "We obviously had little ability to influence the decision makers at Mastertronic/Virgin, so we let them go on their own direction and Beam Software went off on its direction. But that enabled us to begin a second golden period."

Discover what happened to Melbourne House and Beam during the Nineties in part two of this developer lookback next month.

"BEAM BECAME ONLY THE SECOND NON-JAPANESE COMPANY TO DEVELOP GAMES FOR THE NES"

THE MAKING OF...

Castlevania

Symphony of the Night



This year marks the tenth anniversary of Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night, and Konami is celebrating in style by releasing the game on Xbox Live Arcade. Damien McFerran speaks to one of the key players behind this classic slice of 32-bit brilliance



» The bat transformation allows Alucard to enter previously inaccessible areas.

Regular readers of *Retro Gamer* may have noticed that we harbour something of a soft spot for Konami's splendid gothic adventure *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*. We gleefully leap on any excuse to mention it and will happily print screenshots at the slightest provocation, only Capcom's *Strider* features more prominently. In our defence, the blood-sucking platform romp remains one of the most truly essential pieces of 32-bit software and has justifiably attained near-legendary status within the already classic-filled *Castlevania* canon. To commemorate the tenth anniversary of the game, Konami is poised to unleash it for download via Xbox 360's Live Arcade service. Realising that, for once, we had a perfectly legitimate reason to waffle on about the game, we tracked down the man behind the magic – series producer Koji 'IGA' Igarashi – and mercilessly grilled him on the development of what many deem to be the crowning glory of a highly esteemed franchise.

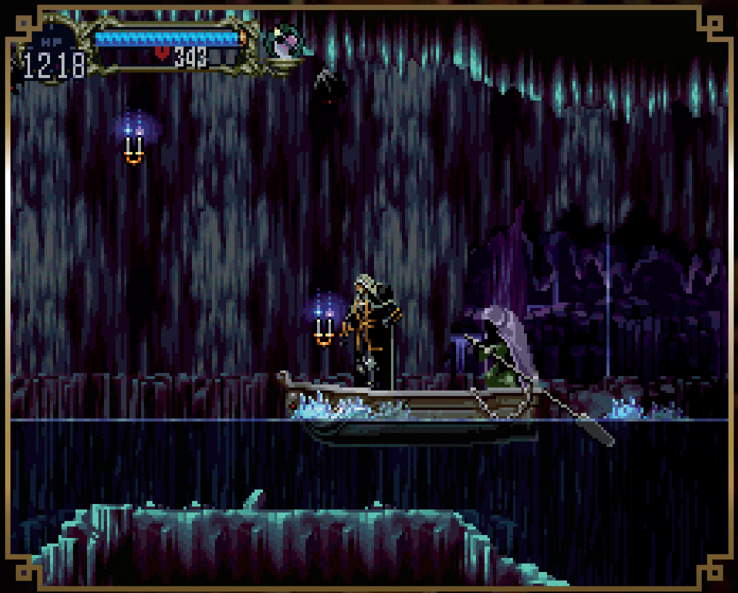
IGA is now responsible for the welfare of *Castlevania* lineage and has recently overseen the production of two excellent Nintendo DS episodes in the shape of *Dawn Of Sorrow* and *Portrait Of Ruin*. He joined Konami in the early-Nineties and worked on a variety of titles before becoming part of the *Castlevania* team prior to the development of *Symphony Of The Night*. The game represented a significant turning point for the series. With the exception of the free-roaming *Simon's Quest* on the NES, over a decade's worth of instalments had displayed an unwavering commitment to the fairly straightforward 'platform action' template, which saw the player utilising the legendary 'Vampire Killer' whip to send all manner of nocturnal beasties packing. Contrary to popular belief, IGA was not employed as primary director on the project – that honour fell to Toru Hagihara, who was also responsible for the excellent *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* on NEC's PC Engine Super CD-ROM system (which incidentally is the direct prequel to *Symphony Of The Night*). However, IGA served as assistant director as well as participating in the writing of the scenario and general programming, so it could be argued that he had the most telling influence over proceedings.

It was apparent from the outset that Konami wished to steer the franchise in a fresh, new direction. "Action games could be cleared in a short time, but I wished to create a game that could be enjoyed for a much longer period," explains IGA. Taking inspiration from Nintendo's SNES classic *Super Metroid*, the team decided to shy away from the stage-by-stage concept of previous titles and cultivate a totally open, free-roaming castle for the player to explore. Hardy adventurers were



» The bells! The bells!

initially denied access to every portion of Vlad's sprawling, demonic fortress from the outset, but thanks to a finely tuned drip feed of abilities – ranging from the humble double-jump to unique shape-shifting enchantments – they would gradually gain entry to more sections of the ageing citadel as progression was made. For example, at various points in the castle the way forward would be barred by iron grilles. To continue, the player had to collect a relic that would permit them to alter their appearance to that of a fine mist, therefore allowing them to pass effortlessly through the obstacle. Another area – a tunnel covered in deadly spikes – could only be traversed when in 'bat' form. These puzzles were not particularly demanding but they resulted in a game that rewarded exploration and proved to be a supremely involving and enjoyable experience, while thankfully retaining the classic hack-and-slash action that aficionados of the series held so dear.



» This looks a strange place for candlesticks if you ask us.

IN THE KNOW



» DEVELOPER: KONAMI

» RELEASED: 1997

» SYSTEM: SONY PLAYSTATION

» OTHER SYSTEMS: SEGA SATURN, TIGER GAME.COM (CANCELLED), PSP, XBLA

» EXPECT TO PAY: £80+ (PAL), £10+ (US/JAPANESE)



"ACTION GAMES COULD BE CLEARED IN A SHORT TIME, BUT I WISHED TO CREATE A GAME THAT COULD BE ENJOYED FOR A MUCH LONGER PERIOD" KOJI 'IGA' IGARASHI

THE MAKING OF...

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

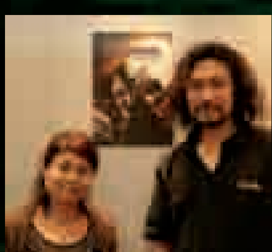
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DRACULA X: RONDO OF BLOOD
SYSTEMS: (PC ENGINE CD-ROM)
YEAR: 1993

METAL GEAR SOLID
SYSTEMS: (PSX)
YEAR: 1998

NANO BREAKER
SYSTEMS: PS2
YEAR: 2005





» Michiru Yamane and Koji 'IGA' Igarashi.



» The epic final encounter with Big Daddy Dracula.

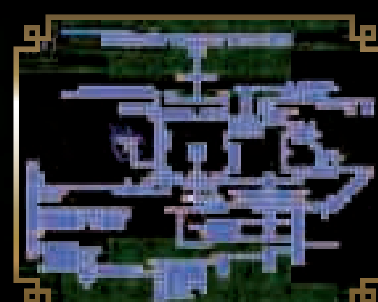
Another major innovation was the introduction of role-playing mechanics. This particular evolution was borne out of the common perception that the series was something of a tough nut in terms of challenge, as IGA explains: "I wanted to change the impression that *Castlevania* was this difficult-to-access action game. When we decided to adopt RPG elements, we agreed that users should receive something good when beating enemies. So I thought of adding Experience Points to the game." For the first time in the series, players could enhance their chances of victory by levelling up and augmenting their character with a vast array of powerful weapons, armour and spells. The concept of earning experience for every enemy successfully slain also prevented the inevitable back-tracking from becoming too arduous, and in many ways made the game more accessible for less skilled gamers. "I thought that even the users who were not good at playing this type of action game would be able to clear *Symphony Of The Night* if I adopted this particular system," continues IGA. Some fans would later complain that the developer was slightly too successful in this regard and actually made the game too easy, and when compared to the stubborn, almost sadistic challenge represented by previous titles (NES *Castlevania*, we're looking at you), they had a point. Regardless of this, *Symphony* still possessed many hours of playtime within the dank, crumbling walls of Dracula's stronghold. The map screen was massive to begin with, but if certain parameters were met the player could teleport to a second castle – an inverted, upside down version of the first – and continue the



» Flying crucifixes can take your eye out, lad.

valiant quest. This effectively doubled the size of the game and the 'proper' ending – one of several – could only be accessed when this second castle was beaten. The introduction of a multitude of useful items, including healing potions, food and one-shot weaponry imbued *Symphony* with a depth unlike anything else experienced in such a title. The urge to collect every trinket, explore the attack possibilities of every weapon, and cover every inch of the evil stronghold proved irresistible for many.

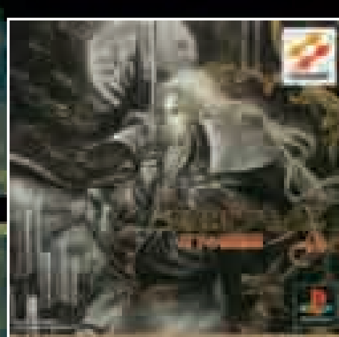
Not content with shaking things up gameplay wise, IGA also turned a few heads when it came to selecting the lead character for the game. Traditionally, the vampire-hunting Belmont clan took centre stage in *Castlevania* titles but *Symphony* saw the player controlling the half-vampire, half-human offspring of Dracula himself, Alucard. "I decided to choose a character that had a special link to the previous *Castlevania* titles," comments IGA. Alucard (Dracula spelt backwards) had appeared as a secondary character in the brilliant NES game *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* – which IGA cites as his favourite entry in the entire series – where he fought

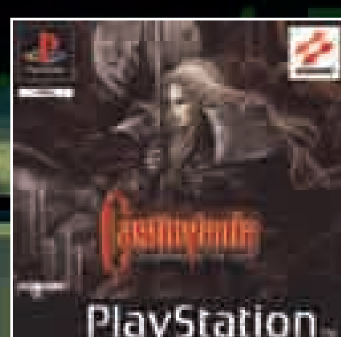


» The map screen takes inspiration from *Super Metroid*.

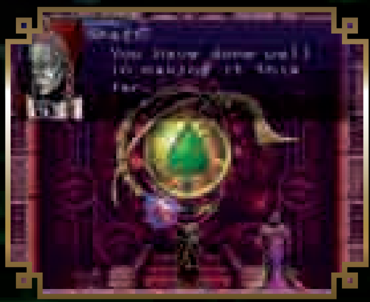
"THE WORLD OF THE VAMPIRE THAT I HAVE IN MY MIND IS BEAUTIFUL AND FLEETING WITH BLOOD AND DARKNESS. THE SERIES HAD A VISUAL IMAGE FEATURING HOSTILITY" KOJI 'IGA' IGARASHI







» **Left:** The abysmal American cover artwork. **Middle:** Ayami Kojima's striking artwork for the Japanese release. **Right:** The Euro release thankfully retained Kojima's stunning work, but sold poorly.



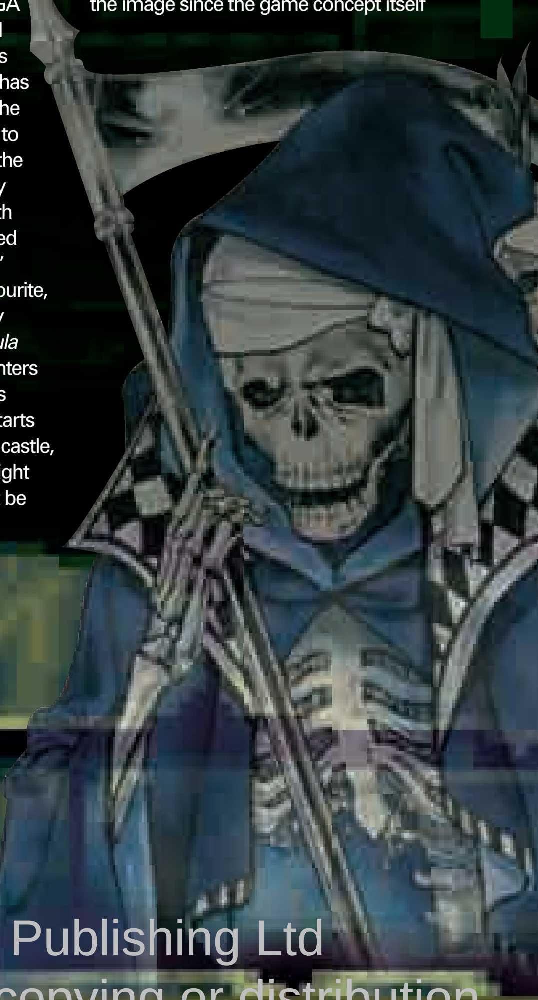
» Who's the man? Shaft! Ahem.

alongside the heroic Trevor Belmont to prevent his patriarch's murderous revival. After sealing this important victory he made the decision to place himself in indefinite hibernation to prevent his cursed bloodline from causing humanity any further mischief. Resurrecting the 'Tragic Prince' for *Symphony* proved an inspired move, but IGA reveals that, at the time, he was concerned that such a sweeping change would anger the fans. "Personally, I liked Alucard very much and it was totally fine with me, but I presumed that those who had been fans for a long time would be angry with our decision since it was the first time the series ever had a non-whip-using character as a hero." In hindsight, he needn't have worried – the fans took to the new lead like a duck to water. "The Japanese title was *Akumajo Dracula X*. I used 'X' to show that it would be apart from the main stream of the series, but surprisingly, it has now become the mainstream," he comments with a degree of satisfaction. Alucard is now regarded as one of the most popular characters in the *Castlevania* universe and IGA is well aware of the contribution he made to the ultimate triumph of *Symphony*. "Alucard was just a really cool hero, and that is why I think *Symphony Of The Night* has been received so favourably by the fans." Nevertheless, in order to appease those few stubborn traditionalists that might have been offended by a vampire taking centre stage, IGA thoughtfully included the option to play as Richter Belmont, albeit as an unlockable extra.

Regardless of the changes being made elsewhere, one aspect of the game retained the brilliance of former titles: the epic boss encounters. In keeping with the grand vision IGA and his team strived to attain, *Symphony* was packed to bursting point with some of the most creative and visually stunning 2D bosses ever witnessed. Many of these fiendish creations were able to trace their roots right back to the NES instalments of the series – the towering Galamoth previously appeared in the disarmingly cute *Castlevania* spin-off *Kid Dracula*, and hardcore fans should have no trouble remembering which other games Medusa, Werewolf and Frankenstein's Monster have cropped up in before. "My favourite is definitely Beelzebub," replies IGA when pressed about which boss he rates highest. Indeed, this particular enemy proved to be one of the most memorable in the entire game, taking the form of a gigantic, rotting corpse suspended on rusty meat hooks. Victory could only be gained by hacking away at his putrid, decomposing limbs while avoiding the unwelcome attention of several massive mutated flies. When you consider the limited RAM of Sony's 32-bit console and the poor reputation it had for hosting 2D titles, it makes IGA's achievements all the more impressive.

The *Castlevania* franchise has always had a reputation for high-quality musical accompaniment and *Symphony* is no exception. Indeed, Many consider Michiru Yamane's work to be the finest ever heard in the series. With this in mind, did IGA ever feel that the expectation of aural excellence imposed limitations on his development? "The music direction has never led the creation of the game," he states. "I have always asked Michiru to compose music in accordance with the actual game and never the other way around. She always co-ordinated with the development team and composed music from the image of the stages." When asked which tune was his favourite, IGA playfully admits that he's slightly biased: "My favourite is *Castle Dracula* which starts to play when Alucard enters the castle for the very first time. I was impressed with the way the music starts to play once Alucard enters the dark castle, and then suddenly the castle gets bright and zombies start to appear. It might be because that particular part of the game was programmed by myself." Yamane's soundtrack was a fusion of rock, jazz and classical styles that appeared hopelessly mismatched on paper but worked surprisingly well in practice. Standout tracks included *Strange Bloodlines,* which played over Richter's battle with Dracula in the prelude; *Wood Carving Partita*, a string-based composition that wouldn't have sounded out of place in a Hollywood period piece; and *Requiem For The Gods*, a largely vocal track which accompanied the Church section of the castle. The musical package was rounded off rather neatly by Rika Muranaka's heart-wrenching *I am the Wind,* which plays over the end credits. It was sung by American Cynthia Harrell, who also performed vocal duties on the infamously camp title theme of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*. Unsurprisingly, the soundtrack CD remains popular with fans a decade after it was published.

The introduction of Ayami Kojima's sumptuous artwork was the icing on an already tantalisingly gorgeous cake. Again, a desire to establish a new vision for the series was the main reason behind her involvement as IGA explains: "The world of the vampire that I have in my mind is beautiful and fleeting with blood and darkness. The series had a visual image featuring hostility, but I tried to change the image since the game concept itself



FANGS FOR THE MEMORIES

In addition to the XBLA release, 2007 will see Konami produce an updated version of the acclaimed PC Engine instalment *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* – this will be the first time the game has been officially published outside Japan. Similar to Capcom's recent PSP blockbuster *Extreme Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*, the game will showcase a brand new 2.5D graphic engine, updated character designs from Ayami Kojima and an all-new soundtrack. Some would argue that the best news regarding this momentous release is the announcement that the original versions of both *Rondo* and *Symphony* will feature as unlockable extras, which means fans will be able to play *Symphony* on the move for the first time ever. Well, those fans who don't have a home-brew PSX emulator working on their PSPs, anyway – not that we condone that clandestine breed of tomfoolery.





CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT



» Richter tackles a giant Vlad in the gripping prologue.

was going to change," he continues. Kojima's mature and astonishingly detailed art elevated the game to a whole new level of brilliance, and for once the series was granted a cohesive image that has endured ever since. Her combination of Japanese sensibility with classical painting methods resulted in some of the most breathtakingly stunning artwork ever attributed to a videogame release and it's testament to her truly wonderful talent that when a new *Castlevania* title is announced you can bet that one of the first questions to flash across internet forums worldwide is 'Has Kojima done the artwork?' Just check out our front cover if you need further proof of her incredible skill.

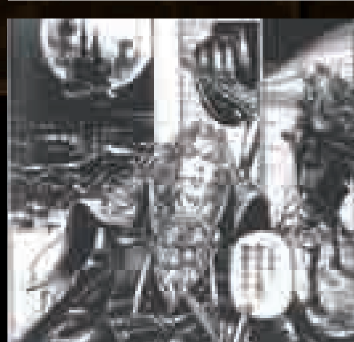
With this amalgamation of fantastic gameplay, stupefying depth, gorgeous design and a downright brilliant musical score, it's unsurprising that *Symphony* went on to sell thousands in Japan where it was released as *Akumajo Dracula X: Gekka no Yasoukyoku* (*Demon Castle Dracula X: Nocturne In The Moonlight*). Huge sales and heaps of critical acclaim were also prevalent when the game debuted in the US but it perplexingly failed to replicate this success in Europe. Reports vary but it is believed that the initial print run for the PAL version was around the 15,000 mark and many of these copies had to be heavily discounted by disappointed stores before they eventually sold. It's been argued that lukewarm reviews in the UK press – several magazines dismissed it as a 16-bit game on 32-bit hardware – contributed to the dour performance at retail, but whatever the cause, Konami knew it had a turkey on its hands and consequently didn't produce any more PAL copies. Meanwhile, in Japan and the US the game was reprinted several times in order to satisfy demand and was eventually granted best-seller status in both territories. The low number of PAL units, coupled with the fact that most came with highly desirable limited-edition items (see Bonus Stage) has recently caused prices to soar – it's not unusual for mint and complete Euro editions to fetch three figures on eBay, while the NTSC versions struggle to scrape £10.

A year after the PlayStation release, *Symphony* was ported to Sega Saturn by Konami's Nagoya studio (not the original team, it should be noted). On paper this promised to be the definitive *Symphony* – the raw 2D clout of Sega's 32-bit machine combined with Konami's boast that it intended to add a raft of exciting features (such as an additional playable character in the form of Maria Renard, two brand new castle areas and a smattering of additional items) resulted in fans being whipped into a frenzy of anticipation. Unfortunately, the eventual release was something of a disappointment. The gorgeous transparency and lighting effects so abundant in the PlayStation original had been replaced by unsightly cross-hatch textures (Saturn infamously struggled with these kinds of effects) and the game was afflicted with bouts of crippling slowdown when the on-screen action became too hectic. The much-hyped new levels were also distinctly underwhelming and were populated by some seriously daft new enemy sprites – the deranged horticulturalist in the Underground Garden instantly springs to mind – and consequently the Saturn port remains a purchase only hardcore fans should seriously consider making. Sega's 32-bit machine had all but given up the ghost in the West by the time the conversion was released in 1998 and as a result it never made it officially outside of Japan (although a Western release was mentioned several times in Sega's own promotional material). This has elevated prices to levels that almost rival that of the PAL PlayStation version.

Interestingly, around the same time another conversion was announced for Tiger's ill-fated Game.com handheld platform. Envisaged as a competitor to Nintendo's all-conquering Game Boy, the Game.com boasted rudimentary

BONUS STAGE

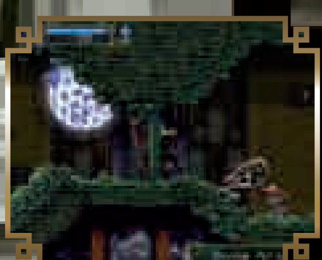




Two bonus items were produced by Konami and bundled with *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* in varying quantities across the three main territories. The first was a small book, which featured a black-and-white illustrated prelude to the game and some lovely full-colour character artwork courtesy of Ayami Kojima. Initially intended solely for the Japanese market (it reads from right to left, as is Japanese custom, and is entitled '*Dracula X: Nocturne In The Moonlight*') the book was eventually carried across to the American and PAL markets too. The second item is a CD, which contains a selection of tracks from various titles in the *Castlevania* series. Both items are highly sought after by fans and the art book alone has been known to fetch £50 on eBay. Amazingly, these items were bundled with the PAL version from launch but were only available to those who pre-ordered in NTSC territories.



» The Sega Saturn version featured some rather silly enemies.



» If dying wasn't enough, these poor skeletons have now been relegated to skull-bearing status.

"I WAS NOT INVOLVED IN THE ACTUAL CONVERSION, BUT I THINK IT WAS HARD SINCE I GAVE SO MANY TOUGH REQUESTS" KOJI 'IGA' IGARASHI







» Screens from the abandoned port for Tiger's ill-advised Game.com console.

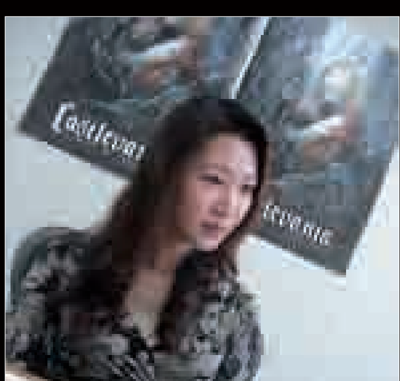


» An advert for the cancelled Game.com conversion.

touch-screen technology and basic online functions, but neither of these potentially groundbreaking features were utilised effectively and a flood of lacklustre software resulted in the monochrome console flopping disastrously at retail. Tiger threw in the towel and development on the *Symphony Of The Night* port (which was being handled in-house by Tiger itself) was brought to an abrupt halt. Beyond a handful of screenshots it's not known exactly how far they got – the official line is that it was half finished, but some sceptics have gone as far as to speculate that the screens were simply mock-ups created in order to generate badly needed public interest in the doomed portable. No playable code has appeared in the intervening years so it's unlikely that it was anywhere near completion and the promise of a portable *Symphony* has only recently been fulfilled (see Fangs For The Memories).

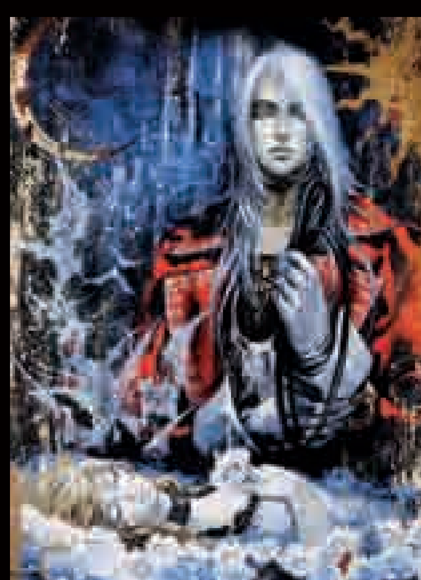
A decade has passed since the world laid eyes on this astounding piece of electronic entertainment, yet interest is still as strong as ever with many devotees adamant that *Symphony* represents the pinnacle of the entire *Castlevania* franchise – no mean feat when you consider the gloriously high benchmark set by past titles like *Super Castlevania IV* and *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* and more recent entries such as the sublime *Aria Of Sorrow* on Game Boy Advance. "I am really proud that it has been evaluated as such," comments IGA with a completely justified sense of pride. However, the man responsible for the future of one of Konami's most valuable franchises steadfastly refuses to rest on his laurels: "I cannot say it was the best since I think I need to always make every endeavour to create better games for everyone to enjoy."

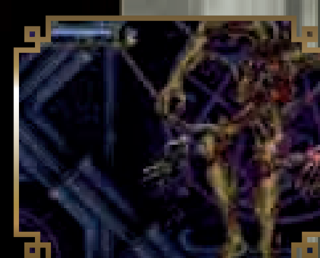
As previously mentioned, the XBLA release of *Symphony* is taking place this year. Programming duties are being carried out by emulation expert Digital Eclipse – now part of Backbone Entertainment – which has previously impressed with several highly accurate and well-received retro compilations. Although IGA is not directly involved, he admits that he has been badgering the developer to ensure it gets superlative results. "I was not involved in the actual conversion, so I don't know much about it, but I think it was hard since I gave so many tough requests to the conversion team when we first handed them the project." There has been talk of various graphical improvements being included and the epic adventure will be the first to break Microsoft's self-imposed 50MB limit for Live Arcade content – an indication of how committed it is to ensuring the port is as faithful as possible. IGA has the utmost confidence in the ability of Digital Eclipse. "I am sure it deserves to be downloaded and played, and hopefully it will reach a brand new audience," he states categorically. Does this brave new method of software distribution intrigue the *Castlevania* producer and does he foresee the possibility of more titles from the series being made available for download? "I am very interested in the online distribution and look forward to it, but that's all I can say for now," he replies enigmatically. One thing is certain – the acclaimed franchise is in very good hands.



AYAMI KOJIMA

Self-taught illustrator Kojima is now so inexorably linked with the *Castlevania* franchise that it's easy to forget that she's only been involved since *Symphony Of The Night*. Kojima started her career by illustrating novel covers, and branched into videogames in 1997 with *Symphony* and the Koei Sega Saturn strategy title *Söldnerschild*. Her contribution to *Symphony* made her something of legend among *Castlevania* enthusiasts and she went on to create further artwork for *Castlevania Chronicles* (PSOne), *Harmony Of Dissonance*/*Concerto Of The Midnight Sun* (GBA), *Aria Of Sorrow*/*Minuet Of Dawn* (GBA), *Lament Of Innocence* (PS2) and *Curse Of Darkness* (PS2/Xbox). Her somewhat unique representation of the male form – highly feminine with lithe bodies and long, flowing locks – has caused consternation among some sectors of *Castlevania* fandom as her work has proven especially appealing to female Shonen-ai (young man love) manga addicts.





» Beelzebub is Iga's favourite boss. After fighting against him, it's easy to see why.

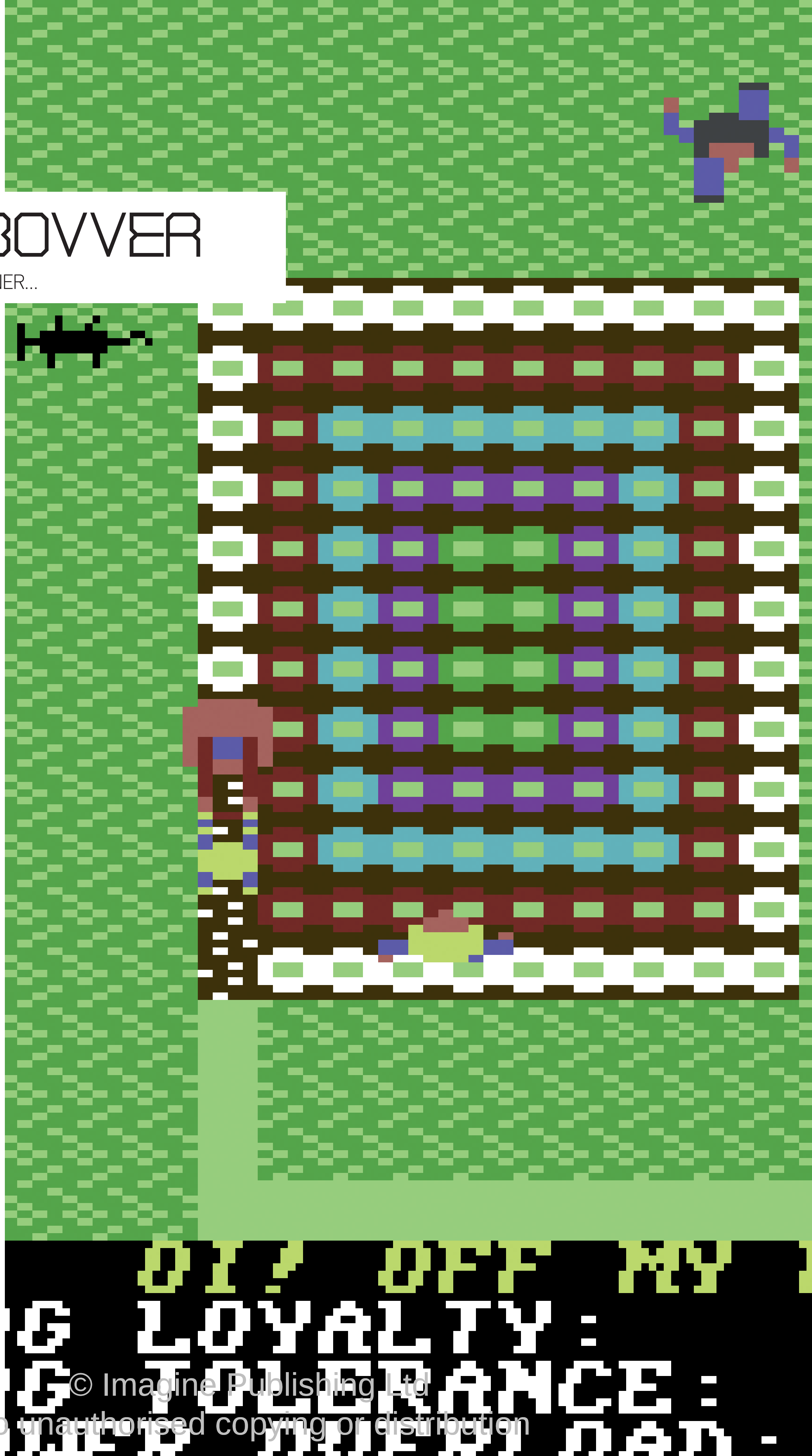


» Alucard stops for a quick breather and a lecture from an irate ghost.

HOVER BOVVER

THE GRASS IS ALWAYS GREENER...





- » **PUBLISHER:** LLAMASOFT
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **GENRE:** ACTION
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** COMMODORE 64
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2

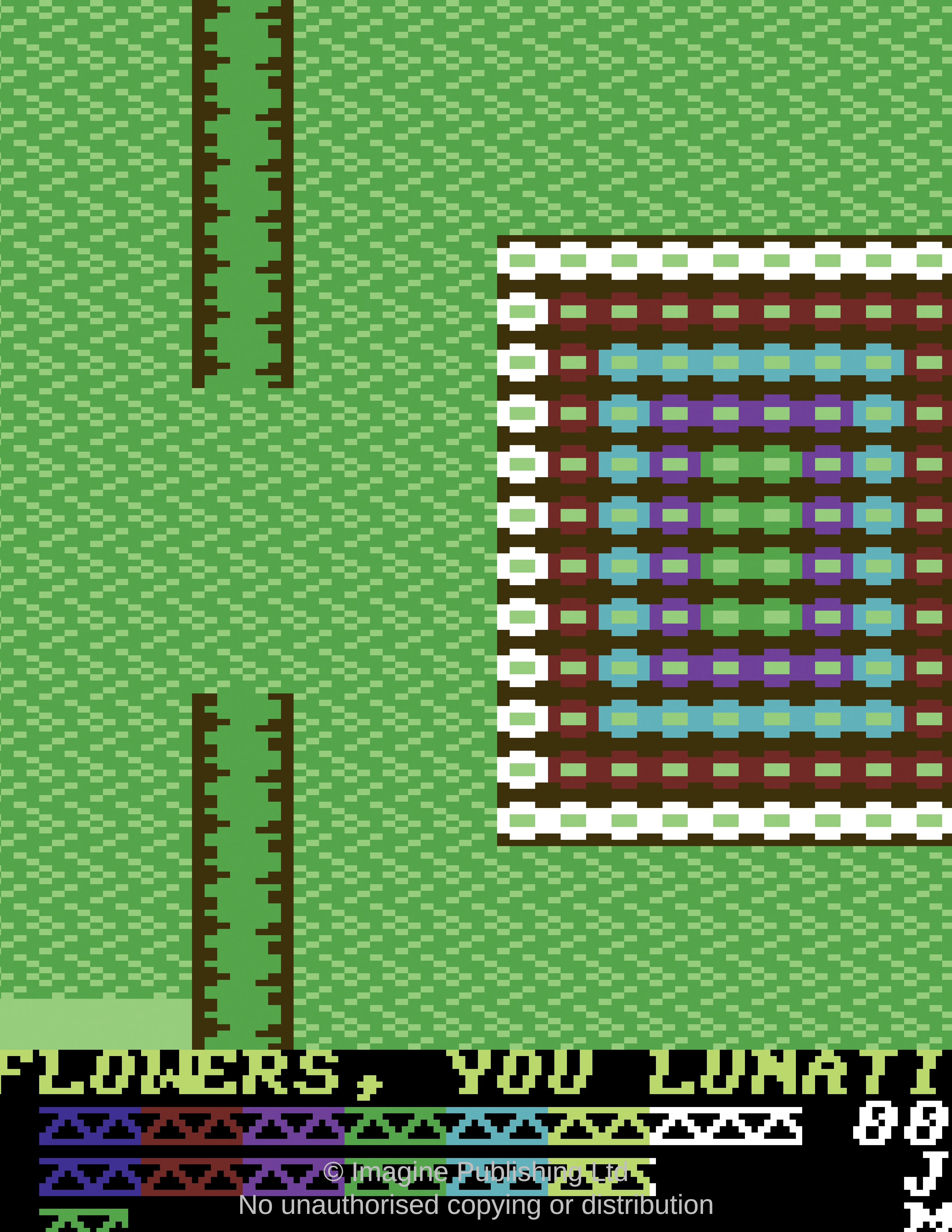
HISTORY



If there's one thing I like about the colder months, it's that I don't have to mow the lawn. You see, I get hay fever, and not just any old hay fever but the kind that makes me think someone sneaked into my bedroom late at night, filled my sinuses with liquid concrete, and then used my head for bongo practice until dawn. Clearly, partaking in an activity that flings considerable amounts of pollen directly into my nostrils isn't something I welcome.

Strangely, though, things I tend to dislike doing – driving and playing tennis, for example – are often the videogame subjects I'm most drawn to. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that I've spent a fair bit of time immersed in Jeff Minter's superlative mow-'em-up, the superbly named *Hover Bovver*. Ultimately, it's the larger-than-life elements within games that make them more interesting than the humdrum nature of reality. For example, careering around a corner at ridiculous speeds in *OutRun 2* is significantly more fun than pootling down the A331, wondering whether you should take the exit to Frimley, because there's usually a bit of a queue at Camberley. And so it is with Minter's videogame version of mowing. Instead of tediously pushing the mower back and forth across your lawn, while the sun tries its level best to melt your eyebrows, *Hover Bovver* gives you a turbo-charged mower, an angry neighbour to avoid (it's his mower that you've, er, 'borrowed'), a gardener to evade (should you accidentally mow over the flowers), and an 'attack dog' to keep loyal (or he attacks you rather than your foes).

It's not like these things don't exist in real life – while I'm unlikely to fling myself around winding country roads at 90 mph, *OutRun*-style, I could spice up my mowing experience by antagonising the dog, stealing my neighbour's mower and then careering headlong into every flowerbed in sight. It might not help my hay fever, but the ensuing chaos should at least take my mind off of it.


FLOWERS, YOU LUNATI



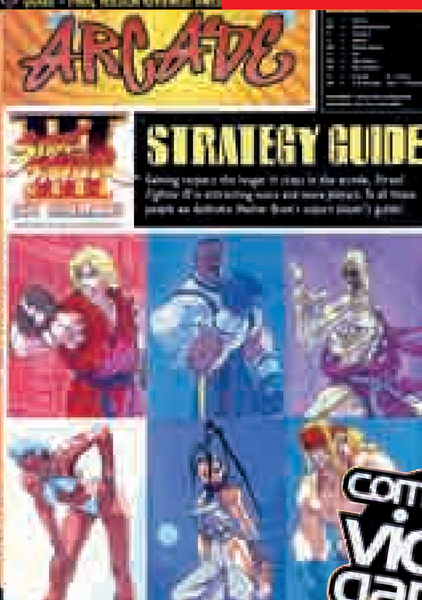
» Official artwork was used wherever possible – the resulting covers were amazing.





» The infamous 'Louise and Parappa' face-off cover. Shudder







The Spirit of the Mad Gamer

CVG 1996-1999

THE LATE COMPUTER AND VIDEOGAMES MAGAZINE (CVG FOR SHORT) WAS ONCE A MASSIVELY RESPECTED MULTI-FORMAT MONTHLY. DAMIEN MCFERRAN TALKS TO THE TALENTED TEAM THAT DID SO MUCH TO SPEARHEAD THE MAGNIFICENT MID-NINETIES REVIVAL AND HELPED IT APPEAL TO A NEW GENERATION OF READERS – BEFORE IT ALL WENT HORRIBLY WRONG.

DATA BOX

- **NAME:** CVG
- **ISSUES:** 277
- **ERA:** 1981 - 2004
- **PAGES:** 140 (APPROX)
- **STAFF:** EDITOR: PAUL DAVIES, ART EDITOR: ALEX HUHTALA, STAFF WRITERS: ED LOMAS, STEVE KAY, TOM GUISE

When CVG disappeared from the newsstands in 2004 it marked the sad demise of one of the world's longest-running videogame publications. The magazine had endured a tempestuous final few years and declining readership meant it was finally laid to rest after covering our beloved hobby for over 20 years. However, this ignominious end could have come much sooner – nearly a decade sooner in fact – were it not for the sterling work performed by the enthusiastic team that rescued the magazine from obscurity in the mid-Nineties.

Central to this tale is Paul Davies, who bagged his first job at London-based publishers EMAP after applying for a vacancy at the hugely popular Mean Machines magazine. He was unsuccessful in this initial bid for journalistic stardom, but fortunately his CV avoided the fate of the waste paper bin and he was drafted in a few short months later to assist the release of Mean Machines Sega and Nintendo Magazine System. During this time he became firm friends with fellow EMAP staffer Tom Guise (formerly of Megatech). The pair were ardent gamers and it didn't take long for them to start getting ideas above their station,







» CVG was one of the few mags to give *Castlevania: SotN* the mark it deserved.







» The latest news reports from Japan were always to found in CVG.

as the eminently likeable Davies recalls: "We were working on our own idea for a magazine, but it was hard to nail everything – we were full of enthusiasm but with no clue on the nuts and bolts required". As the intrepid duo planned their own unique vision of the ultimate videogaming periodical, things over at CVG were less than rosy.

The veteran publication was in severe decline after the glory days of the late-Eighties and was struggling to remain relevant, as single-format publications began to swallow up shelf space in newsagents nationwide. "CVG was sinking with the old computer formats," recalls Davies. "The whole tone of the magazine was wrong – it was the result of so many redesigns at the behest of many different editors and publishers". Things were thrown into disarray when Mark Patterson, the editor at the time, resigned. The once great CVG was apparently in its death throes. "Nobody within EMAP wanted to touch it," remembers Davies, who quickly realised this was the big opportunity to make his dream of the perfect magazine a reality. "Tom and I saw our chance to make it our own. At the time I was Deputy Editor of Nintendo Magazine, under Andy McVittie. Andy was really cool about representing me to the senior publisher and I was handed the reins". Fresh blood was required and Davies set about creating the team that would drive this brave new vision.

The first key team member was Ed Lomas. His route into the wonderful world of videogames is an interesting, albeit unorthodox, one. "I had M.E. (AKA: 'Chronic Fatigue Syndrome' and a bunch of other vague names) from the age of 14 so was stuck at home all day with nothing to do" he recalls. "I wasn't a gamer at all but my grandparents bought me a Mega Drive to pass the time and I ended up getting insanely into games, playing them 15+ hours a day every day and reading loads of mags each month. I started regularly sending in all these tips and guides I was coming up with to pass the time and eventually started hearing back from the mags with little prizes and things". This tip-related tomfoolery would eventually lead to Lomas being hired by EMAP, albeit on a part-time basis: "When I was 16 I was asked to look after the tips section for the Official Sega Magazine. I would pop into the office once a month to take screenshots and generally pester everyone and help out where I could". The fact that CVG was in dire straits was not lost on the youngster. "It was rubbish. I was buying practically every console magazine that was available at the time, but I'd occasionally pick up CVG around then and it was just embarrassing". Thankfully, Lomas would be

"I WOULD POP INTO THE OFFICE ONCE A MONTH TO TAKE SCREENSHOTS AND GENERALLY PESTER EVERYONE AND HELP OUT WHERE I COULD" ED LOMAS



The Spirit of the Mad Gamer



THE YELLOW PAGES

One of the more distinctive features of CVG was the 'Freeplay' section. This was found in the middle of the magazine and was printed on yellow paper. "We admired the Japanese games mags for having these huge reader sections, with lots of columns giving feedback on games plus reader drawings and so on," recalls Davies. "Also I'd noticed that guys in the arcades would take print-outs of moves-lists with them to learn the latest combos or tricks on driving games from FAQs". The team 'borrowed' the concept and filled the section with move lists, tips, hot rumours, reader artwork and a retrogaming section. "It was meant to be like a fanzine within the magazine," adds Lomas. "It took up enormous amounts of our time to put together and the 'cheap' paper cost more than the regular magazine paper, but I think it really added to the spirit of the mag".



"WE HIRED PEOPLE FOR THEIR PASSION FOR GAMES, AND CRUCIALLY THEIR PERSONALITY: PEOPLE WE COULD CALL FRIENDS" PAUL DAVIES

instrumental in the resurgence of the ailing multi-format monthly. Davies was well aware of his rampant enthusiasm for the subject matter and wasted no time in sounding him out for the new CVG dream team. "One day I got a call from Paul Davies and he asked me to be their full-time staff writer," explains Lomas. "That was it, really. I was terrified by the idea as I had no training or qualifications or anything, but the prospect of working on a games magazine was just incredible, so I went for it".

The core team was now emerging and Davies was careful to circumvent the mistakes previous editors had fallen foul of. "We hired people according to their passion for games, and crucially their personality" he remembers. "They had to be people who we'd call friends too, as we all worked very hard and needed to pull together. Plus, we had to have the right attitude".

With Lomas on board, Davies started looking for a second writer to help share the load. The selection process speaks volumes about what kind of magazine CVG was becoming, as Lomas recollects: "We narrowed the applicants down to two – Lee Nutter, who we liked because he sent in a fanzine full of photos of himself arsing around in his garden with an old console and had a funny name, and Alex Huhtala, who also had a funny name". Both were called in to produce a sample review in order to gauge their ability. "Lee Nutter came in wearing a suit and looking far more sensible than in his application photos, and wrote a detailed and lengthy review of *Tomb Raider* or something like that," Lomas continues. "Then Alex Huhtala came in wearing a Hawaiian shirt and shorts with his hair in a huge Ace Ventura quiff. While he was meant to be writing his review I noticed him constantly looking over the top of the monitor to watch me playing



» It wasn't unusual to see eight-page studies of fighting game mechanics.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



» **Paul Davies** Runs UnlikelyHero, writing for various websites

» **Ed Lomas** Works at BBC Magazines

» **Alex Huhtala** PR Manager at SquareEnix Europe

» **Steve Key** Runs Hijack promotions

» **Jamie Smith** Senior Art Designer at Egmont

» **Tom Guise** Works at Penthouse magazine in Australia

Destruction Derby 2 instead. He ended up leaving a really ropey, unfinished review basically saying that he loved *NiGHTS*. So we unanimously picked him". Thankfully Lee Nutter's endeavour didn't go to waste – he was later hired for EMAP's Official Sega Saturn Magazine.

Echoing the thoughts of the Mean Machines team (see Retro Gamer 31), the CVG staffers considered the working conditions at EMAP lacklustre at best. "I used to get an electric shock every time I put a floppy disk in the drive," grimaces Jamie Smith, who worked as Art Editor during this period. "There was an insect infestation once, and it turned out that the flies were hatching from larvae growing inside our instant coffee machine". However, just like their illustrious forebears, they soldiered on regardless. "It was a shit hole really, but I loved it," remembers Lomas. "Wonky desks, broken chairs, stacks of consoles and games everywhere, everyone's desks piled with shit, cables running across the floor, toys all over the place, defaced posters, sweet wrappers, crap all over the walls and ceiling… just like a teenage gamer's dream home, really".

EMAP's approach to creating magazines at the time was refreshingly relaxed. "I don't think there are many magazine companies that would take the chances that EMAP did regarding the hiring of staff," remarks Lomas. "EMAP would simply hire the most enthusiastic, interesting, intelligent people – not the most qualified or the most experienced or the most organised, just the biggest, craziest gamers with the most passion for telling people about games. Then they'd let them make their ideal magazine, with no









» The Davies era saw CVG embrace consoles more whole-heartedly than ever.

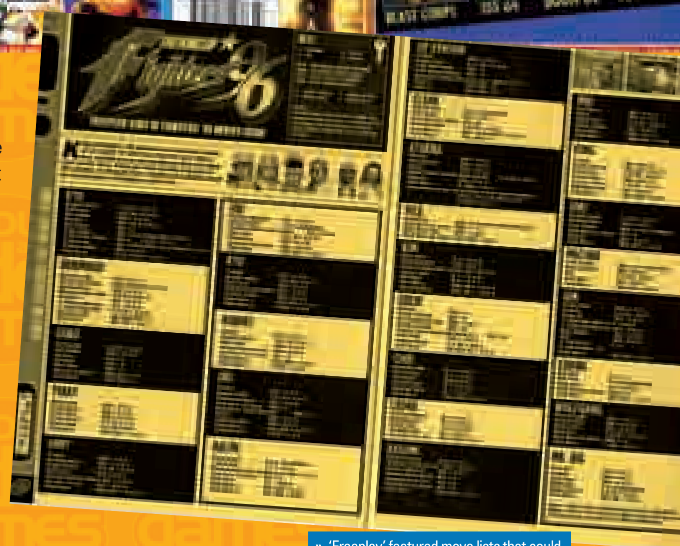
interference from above whatsoever". Sadly this attitude would change with the years, but we'll get to that later.

Working on the magazine was a joy, as Lomas recollects: "I felt like Tom Hanks in *Big*, where he's suddenly working in the big city, testing toys and getting paid for it. Only instead of working with stupid wankers in suits, I was working with a bunch of extremely cool, creative, enthusiastic people in an amazingly laid-back yet hardworking environment". Sheer enthusiasm for the subject matter, coupled with a sense of fun, kept the magazine ticking over. "The core CVG team was brilliant" beams Lomas. "Everyone was trying to outdo everyone else, so we'd write little bits and pieces into our text that would have the designers chuckling when they came to lay the page out, then they'd work little jokes into the layout to make us laugh when we came to check it. There was no serious magazine craft or publishing going on – it was just a bunch of guys having an enormous laugh making a magazine about all the brilliant games they were playing, and how much fun they were having. I think that came across in the finished magazine".

Leafing through any issue from this wonderful era reveals one key fact – the team lived and breathed videogames. Going against the grain of the time – which was magazines firmly supporting one format or another – the team made sure they championed quality titles regardless of the popularity of the host console. This adoration of gaming would manifest itself in the most unusual of ways: 'The Spirit of the Mad Gamer'. Lomas explains: "It's just the all-consuming, wild-eyed insanity that would be brought on by the most exciting of games, where you can't sleep because you see the game playing in front of you whenever you shut your eyes, you hear the music in your head all day, your heart races whenever you think about it and you can't think or talk about anything else, you spend every waking moment trying to be the absolute best at the game in the world, and you obsess over every piece of artwork or merchandise you can find". Davies elaborates: "It's an old cliché that appeared in CVG so many times, but when we said 'we can't wait' for a game we really meant it. We were chomping at the bit. We were all possessed, but some of us were better at hiding it than others".

The staff made sure they didn't fall into the trap of pandering to a certain side of the market. They would just as easily put an obscure import game on the cover as they would a mainstream release such as *Tomb Raider 2* or *Tekken 3* if they believed that the title was worthy of the privilege. "We wanted to make believers out of everyone" Davies insists. "Because Paul, Tom Guise and Ed played games like *Radiant Silvergun* they went in the mag. We didn't have the PR pressure to put so-and-so game on the cover, we just put on what we wanted," adds Art Editor Jamie Smith. Having said that, the team did make some questionable choices when it came to cover stars, as Davies begrudgingly admits: "We put Louise Nurding (now Redknapp) on the cover with Parappa but I thought that was okay at the time. Even the Spice Girls game had an element of humour about it. They were our lowest points".

At a time when other magazines were criticising games like *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* because it featured



» 'Freeplay' featured move lists that could be removed and taken to local arcades.



» The magazine went as far as to include breakdowns of gameplay systems.



The Spirit of the Mad Gamer



» The final issue of CVG appeared in 2004.



"CASTLEVANIA: SOTN IS STILL ONE OF THE GREATEST GAMES I'VE EVER PLAYED AND IF IT WAS PUT IN FRONT OF ME TOMORROW I'D STILL GIVE IT TOP MARKS" ALEX HUHTALA

2D visuals, the staff at CVG were unafraid to nail their colours to the mast. "It didn't matter what format a game was running on, whether it was a few pixels or thousands of polygons, if it played well then we'd say so," comments Alex Huhtala. "*Castlevania: SotN* is still one of the greatest games I've ever played and if it was put in front of me tomorrow I'd still give it top marks because the gameplay is timeless". The staff were also brave enough to support unfashionable machines like the Saturn and regularly devoted six-page spreads to Japanese games that didn't have a prayer of being released officially in the West. Gestures like this endeared CVG to the disenfranchised 'hardcore' gaming sector of the market.

Such was the honestly of the team that one irate publisher took offence and threatened legal proceedings against the magazine. Lomas is typically dismissive of such action: "If something was shit, we'd say it was shit. Some PR people didn't like this concept and used to get annoyed with us, but I'm proud to say we never backed down. We had advertising pulled many times, we had people refuse to send us games and we completely broke off contact with a number of companies that we wouldn't 'play ball' with. We even got letters from solicitors – it was great!" The magazine quickly gained a reputation for telling the truth, as staff writer Steve Key recalls: "We had a release dates section I was in charge of. Within this, we used to flag up the games for people to look out for and ones for them to avoid. I can't remember the game, but we'd seen a preview of it and it didn't look very good, so we flagged it one to avoid. When the mag hit the shelves we got an angry call from the publisher saying that HMV had slashed their order for the game on the basis of our opinion. That was a real testament to the respect the magazine had".

CVG successfully covered the launches of the Nintendo 64 and Sega Dreamcast and, as you might expect, the team got

» CVG featured a simplified 'high five' rating system.





» Reader artwork was often a bit deranged.

very animated about both. "For me, going to Tokyo for the launch of N64 was the finest moment of my career," gushes Davies. "I can still remember peering through the glass of the exhibition hall and seeing Mario's face in 3D and thinking it must be a promotional animation, then realizing it wasn't". There was a genuine feeling that the staff were gamers just like everyone else and they were discovering this stuff with the same kind of wide-eyed eagerness that any true gaming fan would. "Before the internet was big, these things were immensely exciting," explains Lomas. "The game shows would have tons of things nobody had ever heard of, and they weren't going to hear anything about them until you got home and wrote your feature for the magazine".

As the millennium drew to a close, the CVG crew were at the height of their collective powers. However, events behind the scenes at EMAP would have irrevocable consequences for the publication. "EMAP wanted to achieve sales in excess of 120K across all its consumer magazines," recalls Davies. "That was it. Our 80-90K sales weren't quite good enough". Greed is cited by the majority of the team as the true motivation behind the ill-fated move, as Huhtala confirms: "Despite outselling the majority of the competition, management thought that CVG could sell far more and so decided to make the magazine more mass market".

Regardless, the team dug deep and started work on the redesigned magazine they assumed they would continue to write for. "We all had so many brilliant ideas that we had been saving up for years that we wanted to put into it," remarks Lomas. "We'd all become quite experienced magazine makers by this point, and could have made something really special". Unfortunately the team no longer had the full support of their publisher. Davies, who had done so much to turn the fortunes of CVG around, was unceremoniously dumped as editor and Matt Howell (previous experience: editing a motorcycle monthly) was drafted in to take his place. "I was seen as too close to the





subject with not enough mainstream experience," explains Davies. He recalls the upheaval with obvious displeasure: "I had no say in this; in fact, I felt lucky still to have a job – some other editors were squeezed out of the company, and it was horrible to see. It was terrible man management. It was all I could do to keep the rest of the lads in fighting spirit to prevent their careers from being spoiled".

Battered and bruised, the team regrouped in an attempt to regain control of a rapidly unravelling state of affairs. "We all made it really clear to Matt that we all wanted to be massively involved in anything he did," remembers Lomas. "He promised that this would be the case, but I remember after a few months of nothing much happening, he showed us a dummy of the mag to see what we thought. We thought it was complete shit, but figured it was just a rough concept. Turned out he'd just come back from a board meeting where this final proposal had been approved, and that we'd be making the next issue like that. So we had no input into it whatsoever."

Steve Key elaborates on the situation: "The publishers bought in people who had no gaming background but a solid foundation in publishing and newspapers in the hope that they'd bring some of their 'mainstream' experience to the mag. They didn't appreciate that the people who read CVG were people who knew a lot about games. The unique elements that could have made CVG stand out from the crowd were ripped apart. The individuality went and the tone became patronising rather than knowledgeable and that's when it all started going horribly wrong". Davies agrees: "They mistook enthusiasts for losers, and thought these people wouldn't mind if they stripped out all the information and generalized it for a more general audience".

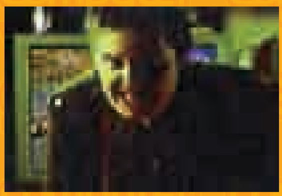
The result of all this change wasn't exactly what EMAP had expected. "We lost well over half our readers in the space of a few months and the magazine never recovered," states Huhtala, sadly. "We all quit within the next couple of months," adds Lomas.



» The famous Freeplay Retro Cabin – the first of its kind?

BOY FROM BRAZIL

Not many videogame hacks can boast they've been on Brazilian telly, but Steve Key can. When Sega released the Saturn in the South American country, they had a unique idea for the TV advert, as Key recalls: "They were planning to take a games champion from the UK, the US and Japan and have them star in the ad. I jokingly said I'd fill in for them if they got stuck. The actual UK champ at the time was born in England, but was Japanese, so he couldn't go as they needed someone who looked English. The next guy wasn't old enough to fly on his own and wanted to take his entire family and their dog, so he was passed over. I seem to remember the next guy not even having a passport. Basically everyone who was a genuine champion in the UK couldn't go and I got a call one day asking if I was still interested, as they needed someone to go. The TV ad was amusing as it involved me turning some German-nanny-dominatrix-type into a bondage chair using a Saturn. Bizarre but amusing and an experience I'll never forget".













It was a sad end to one of the most triumphant periods in CVG's history. Within the space of an issue the magazine had been transformed almost beyond recognition; it haemorrhaged readers and never regained the respect and admiration instilled by Davies and his team. EMAP tried to salvage things with redesigns and staff changes, but the damage was, unfortunately, fatal. CVG would eventually be sold to Dennis Publishing, who would in turn offload it a short time later to Future Publishing. The Bath-based company closed down the underperforming magazine and it now only exists as a website.

Regardless of the rather shameful manner in which the rug was pulled from beneath them, the Davies-era team carry fond memories of the time. "Working on CVG was like hanging out with your mates all day, because we were all good friends," explains Smith. "I genuinely don't think I'll ever have a job like that again," comments Key. We'll leave it to Davies to have the final say: "It was magic, like being paid to be at college – we were all really good friends, complete with stupid rivalries and cliques. I always counted myself very lucky".

» Obscure arcade releases were covered in-depth – hardcore gamers rejoiced.



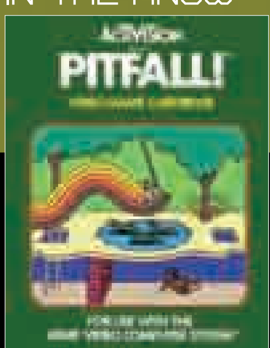
THE MAKING OF…

PITFALL!

When Mario was content dodging barrels thrown by a giant monkey and booting Koopas about, a true platforming hero was already making his mark, collecting treasures and avoiding countless nasties – and all on the humble Atari 2600. Join Craig Grannell as he talks to David Crane about the genesis of Pitfall!



IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
» **DEVELOPER:** DAVID CRANE
» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM GAME
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5

***Pitfall!* For gamers of a certain age, the name alone is enough to bring about a warm, fuzzy feeling of gleeful nostalgia.** Often cited as the earliest example of platform gaming, released as it was in 1982, programmer David Crane managed to eke out more than many thought possible from the humble Atari 2600. Technically amazing for the time, the game featured varied backgrounds, and had several animated, non-flickering sprites on each screen; the game's impressive visuals were matched by the all-engrossing gameplay, the player guiding Pitfall Harry though dozens of 'scenes', searching out treasure, using vines to swing across gaping pits, leaping on to the heads of crocodiles, and nipping underground to take shortcuts.

The genesis of the game was its main character – in the late Seventies, David was tiring of typical controllable elements in games, and wanted to create something more personable. "Back then, there were very few attempts at animated figures in games – you controlled tanks, jet planes, Pong paddles, and so on, because the limited number of display pixels severely restricted the creation of smooth animation," he explains. But in 1979, David had developed a realistic-looking human character – he just needed a game in which to house him. "Each time I was about to start another game, I brought out my little running man and cast about for a game that needed him," remembers David. "I tried a cops-and-robbers game, in which the man was running from the police, but I didn't like that concept, and so he went back on the shelf."

Eventually, in 1982, David was between games and decided he'd finally figure out a game for his diminutive animated man. He sat down with a blank sheet of paper and drew a stick figure in the centre. He then said: "Okay, I have a running man… Let's put him on a path," and drew two more lines on the paper. The path needed a location, and so David placed it in a jungle, surrounding it with trees. And then he had to figure out why his character was running in the first place. "I drew treasures to collect, enemies to avoid, and *Pitfall!* was born," he says, noting that the entire process of coming up with the concept took about ten minutes (although the subsequent programming clocked in at a rather more lengthy 1000 hours).

As David developed his game, three clear influences crept in: "First, *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* was playing in cinemas, and that started me thinking of an adventure in the jungle in the first place. Secondly, I really wanted Harry to swing on a vine, for which I have to give a nod to *Tarzan*.



» Harry, reflecting on the enormity of his task, took solace in being colour-coordinated with the surrounding jungle.



» As Harry jumped six feet into the air, it occurred to him that he should try out for his local athletics team.



» Harry thanked his lucky stars that the crocodiles were too lazy to eat anything that didn't stumble right into their open mouths.

"RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK WAS PLAYING IN CINEMAS, AND THAT STARTED ME THINKING OF AN ADVENTURE IN THE JUNGLE IN THE FIRST PLACE"
DAVID CRANE



» As Harry plummeted towards the crocodile's gaping jaws, he cursed David Crane for not giving him the ability to fly.

And finally, I remembered from deep in my childhood a pair of Magpie cartoon characters called Heckle and Jeckle. They had a sequence during which they'd run across the heads of alligators, barely escaping the snapping jaws. I thought that would make for an interesting skill sequence in the game." But even with these elements starting to fall into place, David considered *Pitfall!* too linear: "The game began as a single-level trip through the jungle, but that made for a boring experience." The solution was the addition of an underground passageway, guarded by scorpions. This provided a crucial level of strategy to the game, because each screen that Harry traversed underground was the equivalent to three screens on the surface. "Using the underground paths, you could bypass empty or treacherous overhead screens, and without using them, you can't finish the game," says David.

Although simple by today's standards, cramming all of these ideas and characters into the Atari 2600 was a huge undertaking, and David admits that many ideas had to be tailored specifically for the console. "All objects in an Atari 2600 game are selected based on what can be drawn using the system's limited capability," he explains. "For example, early in my career at Atari, I designed a slot-machine simulator. When I tried to draw traditional slot-machine symbols – cherries, lemons, oranges, and so on – it became clear that there was no way to render them in eight monochrome pixels. Therefore, I used cacti, cars and other angular objects that were easily recognisable when drawn with pixels." A similar process was used with *Pitfall!*, with David colouring in squares on squared paper to figure out what the pixelated graphics would look like: "I experimented with objects until their identities were clear, and made the game work with the best-looking graphics." Oddly enough, Pitfall Harry sort of started life as David himself, before being reduced to a handful of pixels: "I'd worked on the little running man for a while, posing in mid-stride and sketching my own leg and arm positions, and so you could say that what you see is me running across the screen. Once you reduce something to a few pixels, however, any similarity to any person, living or dead, is lost!" Elsewhere, the swinging vine also proved to be a technical challenge. "It was made out of a single-pixel-wide Atari 2600 object whose position was moved left or right down the screen – you can see the same technique in two of my earlier games: *Fishing Derby* and *Laser Blast*," says David.

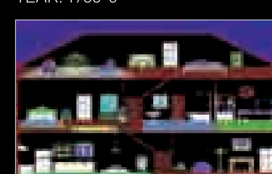
Even carefully crafting pixel-perfect graphics wasn't enough to get around the 2600's limitations, though,

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

FREEWAY
SYSTEMS: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1981

GHOSTBUSTERS
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, APPLE II, ATARI 2600, ATARI 800/XL/XE, COMMODORE 64, MSX, NES, SEGA MASTER SYSTEM, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985-9

LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, APPLE II, COMMODORE 64, ZX SPECTRUM (128K)
YEAR: 1985-6



THE MAKING OF...

PITFALL!



» Harry resisted bellowing a Tarzan-like cry as he swung across the lake – although he was very tempted.

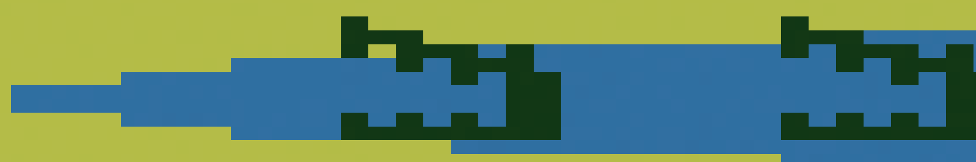


» With glee, Harry noted the huge dollar sign on the bag, advising would-be kleptomaniacs that it wasn't full of snakes or old pants.



» As Harry fell down the pit, he gained crucial first-hand experience regarding the relevance of the game's name.

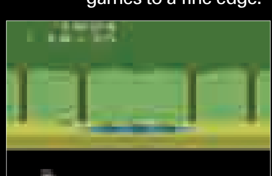




TEAM PLAYERS

Although many of Activision's games are credited as solo projects, David notes that much of the company's success came from the group synergy within the design lab: "While we each had our own game project working, we'd also kibbutz on each-other's games. That way, each game had the flavour of its designer, but benefited from the vision and experience of the entire group."

Pitfall! was no exception. David explains that only a week before *Pitfall!*'s release, the game only offered the player a single life. "I was experimenting with that concept as sort of the ultimate challenge," David explains. "That's right – fall in one pit and start over from the beginning! Thankfully, my buddies practically tied me to my chair until I put in extra lives, and I'm glad they did!" David notes, though, that most help came in much smaller details: "These things were so small that taken individually you'd never notice. It was the sum total of all the feedback and suggestions that polished the games to a fine edge."



especially when taking into account the sheer size of *Pitfall!* "The world of *Pitfall!* is a circular path 254 screens in circumference. The game ROM contains only 4K of memory, and so there's not enough memory to hold both Harry's graphic frames and the definitions for 254 screens," explains David, noting that the largest ROM in 1982 was a mere 4096 bytes, and that these days, 254 screens could take over half a million bytes. "But this is the kind of challenge that I have always enjoyed," says David. "I solved the problem on *Pitfall!* by creating an algorithm that defined every screen mathematically. The actual definition of the entire world took fewer than 50 bytes of ROM."

The way David went about accomplishing this was, he says, very technical. "At the core is a polynomial counter – a special binary counter that counts in a pseudo-random sequence. We used these polynomials to generate randomness in many of our games, but for the screen definitions I made a special counter that could create a sequence both forward and backwards," explains David. "If I called one algorithm, it would give me the next number in the sequence; with another, I could get the previous number." Therefore, if Pitfall Harry ran off of the right-hand edge of the screen, David called up the next number in the sequence; if he turned around and ran back off of the left-hand edge, he'd call up the previous number. With this number used to define each screen, a unique scene was defined that's the same each time the player visits it. "That was the tricky part," says David. "Now, if we select screen elements based on this number, we can define each individual screen. For example, we can define the background tree patterns based upon three bits of the 8-bit number, and the pit or pond type from three other bits. The treasures and hazards can be specified the same way. As long as every detail of the screen is based on that one number, the entire world can be computed algorithmically with very little memory. After that, you just have to find an interesting point in the sequence to start the game! As far as I know, this is the only time this technique has been used in this way."

With such attention to detail and careful programming, along with the fact that *Pitfall!* was a huge technical achievement, it perhaps comes as little surprise that David wouldn't want to turn the clock back and change anything. "I tweaked the heck out of that game, and I didn't let it go to market until I was satisfied. There is nothing I would have done differently," he claims. When pressed, though, he does admit that the limitations of the Atari 2600 meant that one thing couldn't



» Harry stared longingly at the huge gold bar, wondering how he would fit it in his pocket.



» Harry made a mental note to discover who built the underground tunnel, to avoid using the same interior designer.



» The snake blew a raspberry at Harry, mocking his rope-swinging abilities.



» Majestically leaping over the giant scorpion, Harry regretted not bringing a can of extra-strength bug spray to the jungle.

DRIVING GAME

Although primarily tied to the small screen (along with a momentary leap to the arcades, as we'll see next month), *Pitfall!* has one unique placement in the real world, in the form of David Crane's car number plate. "In 1982, I had just gotten a new car and I was thinking about getting a personalised licence plate," he recalls. "It dawned on me that 'PITFALL' is a seven-letter word, and seven letters was the limit at the time for personalised plates in California." David said that he ran right out to the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) and grabbed the plate. "I still use it today, 25 years later," says David, clearly proud of what's turned out to be a smart investment. "And it still gets a few comments, although the most common response is, 'Funny plate… What do you mean it's a videogame?'"

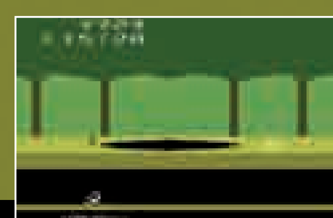


"PITFALL! SPAWNED AN ENTIRE GENRE OF GAMES: THERE WERE OVER 600 'PLATFORM' GAMES RELEASED TO THE MARKET FOLLOWING PITFALL!" DAVID CRANE

make it into *Pitfall!*: "I wish I could have provided really cool victory sequences in my Atari 2600 games. A player who completed the game and collected every treasure should have been rewarded with an amazing animation, but there was never enough memory left over once the game was complete."

Clearly, such niceties didn't matter to the games-playing public at the time. *Pitfall!* was a resounding success for Activision, meeting with huge critical acclaim. Many gamers were amazed at what their humble Atari console was suddenly capable of, and the result was *Pitfall!* sitting atop the Billboard charts for a massive 64 consecutive weeks, shifting an estimated four million copies. "You can't have success like that and not know you had a hit on your hands," says David, in reaction to us asking whether he always knew *Pitfall!* was something special. "Even early on in development, it was clear that this was a milestone in videogames – the first 'platform' game. It opened complete new worlds of exploration-style games." So, how does it feel to be the one to kick-start a genre, and for others to exploit it so thoroughly over the coming years? "*Pitfall!* did spawn an entire genre of games: there were more than 600 'platform' games released to the market following *Pitfall!* – a clear example that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," mulls David. "But, honestly, that was nothing new in the early days of Activision – there wasn't a single game created in the first five years there that didn't contain an advancement for state-of-the-art videogames. Whether it was a new programming technique, a new graphic feature, or just some new way to make the 2600 perform, every game we released spawned imitations." In fact, David even claims programmers from other companies have since admitted to him that they lifted complete sections of code from Activision games just to be able to compete on the same playing field! "But at the time, there were only a handful of people in the world who knew how difficult it was to make the unique displays in our games," concludes David. "It was like having one's entire working life become one giant puzzle. Fortunately, I like puzzles!"

Luckily for avid fans of the game, David wasn't quite done with Pitfall Harry. While Harry joined the cast of the CBS *Saturday Supercade* cartoon, David was hard at work on the sequel, which would borrow elements from the show, including its theme song and characters. So tune in next month, viewers, and you'll discover how our intrepid programming hero, David Crane, broke yet further new ground when working on *Pitfall II: Lost Caverns*.



» As Harry admired the giant ring, he decided he didn't want to meet the girl on whose finger it would snugly fit.

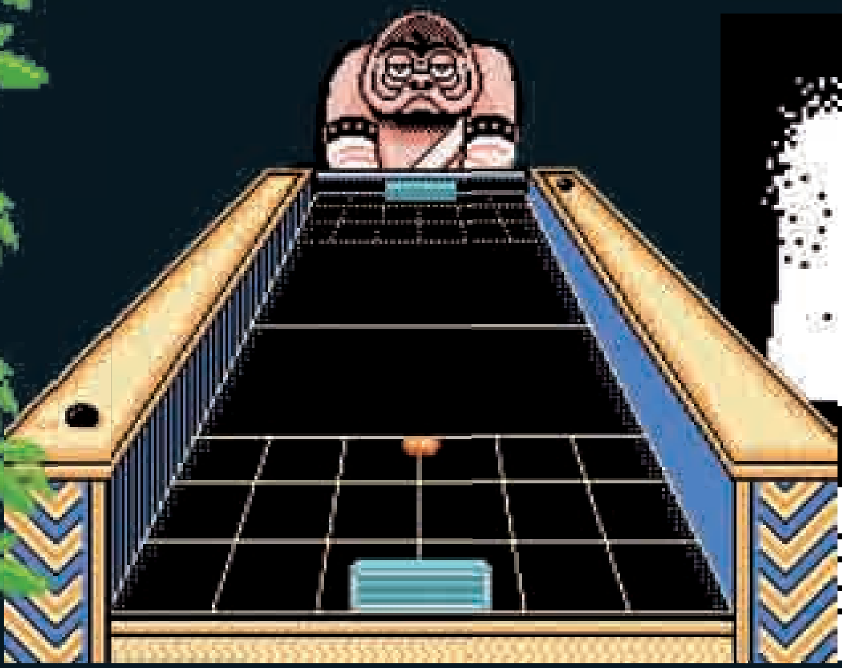


» With two seconds left on the clock, Harry's realised his chance of collecting all the treasure was lower than the underground scorpion breaking out into song.

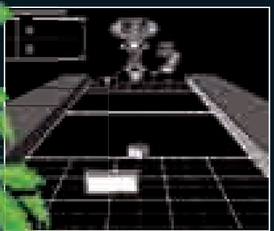
THE CLASSIC GAME

SHUFFLEPUCK CAFE

Nintendo Wii? Pfft! Brøderbund's futuristic air-hockey simulator was doing the virtual controller thing before even the SNES was a glint in the milkman's eye…







» After spotting the bipedal aristocratic lizard-like alien, our hero wondered if he'd stumbled into David Icke's mind.

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** BRØDERBUND SOFTWARE
- » **DEVELOPER:** BRØDERBUND SOFTWARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **GENRE:** SPORTS SIMULATION
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

You're tired and it's getting late. But you're on to the biggest Krypton-3 sale of your career, and that keeps you going as you speed further away from the comforts of home. But then: disaster – your Nash Sombrero transporter blows a capacitor in the reactor valve and you're forced to leave the gravway and coast down into a sinister-looking neighbourhood. Signs of life are few, but light and noise emanate from a nearby ramshackle building, and so you investigate. Big mistake. Hostile eyes are immediately upon you, and your exit is blocked. You spy a phone, but between it and you is the shufflepuck table, and eight galactic misfits vying for a game. You get the distinct impression that passing up on the challenge would see your head replacing the puck pretty rapidly.

Anxious, with drops of sweat starting to congregate on your brow, you eye up the competition lurking in front of the rickety bar, staffed only by a dilapidated service droid. You spot the 'championship' board, with 'Biff Raunch' scrawled on it. A huge biker gives you a glare you'll never forget, and even the others in the room appear in awe of him. Clearly, he's the man to beat.

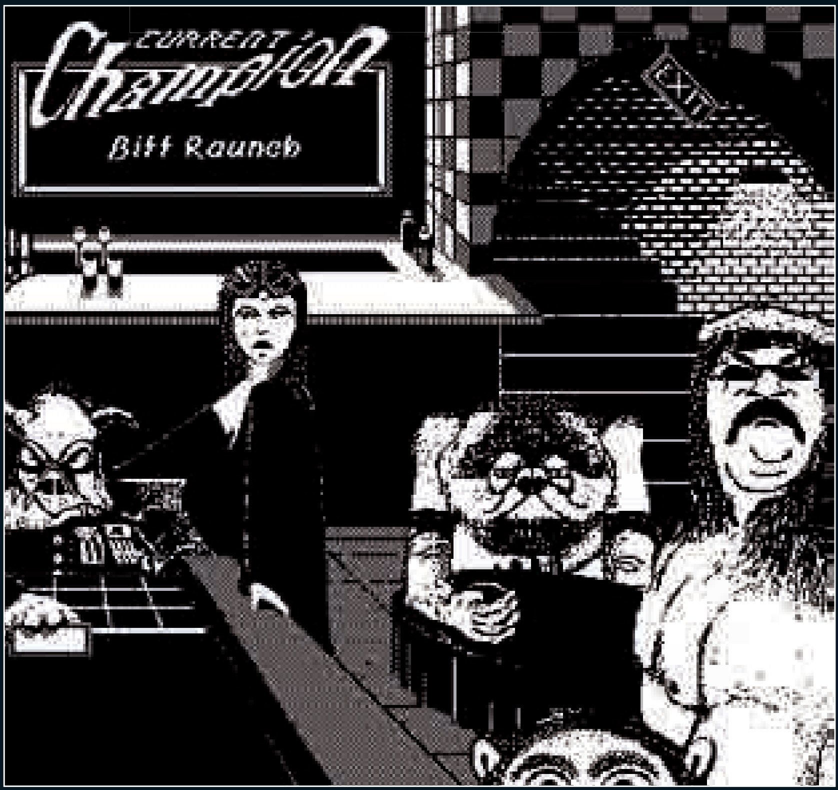
Nervously, you take your place behind the table, a paddle at once your sole defence and hope of rescue. Relief descends as your first opponent steps up – he's just a boy, and a puny one at that. "Good shot!" he squeaks, as you speed the puck past his bumbling defensive moves again and again. He's rapidly demolished 15–0. "Hah!" you think, getting a little over-confident, and thinking you might soon be on your way.

The thrashing style of the extremely short Visine Orb – his paddle twitching all over the place – momentarily throws you, and you lose a couple of points, before recovering to score 15 in a row. Visine cries as he loses, and that makes you feel better. You wonder if you're a bad person for that. Next: gruff alien grad student Vinnie the Dweeb steps up to the table; he's calm and collected, but predictable and easily beaten.

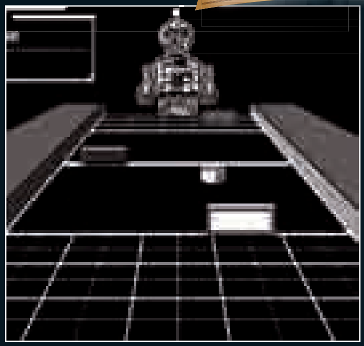
Soon, however, the tables begin to turn. Lizard-playboy Lexan Smythe-Worthington stumbles up to the table, reeking of blue champagne, and you think another easy victory is in the offing, but he plays with a ferocity far above that shown by your previous opponents. Thankfully, he also plays with a glass of bubbly in one hand, taking a sip for each



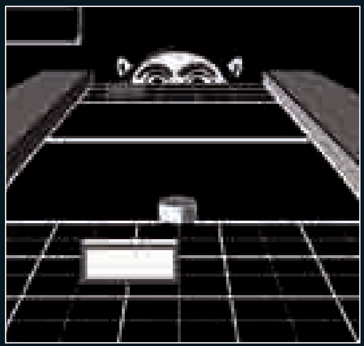
» Getting mercilessly beaten again, Skip Feeny mulled over losing out to Daniel Radcliffe for the lead in *Harry Potter*.



» The Sisters of Mercy fan-club were in an unusually happy mood.



» The human-hating robot longed for the days of Elvin Atombender's reign as he continued his several-thousandth training session.



» Don't worry, the screenshot is supposed to look like this. Leanoric proves he's a dab hand at flinging lightning bolts.

point won. His game slips, and you scrape a victory, only to face Eneg 'The General' Doowtrop, a pig-like alien, utterly devoted to the game. His demented playing style suits an intergalactic revolutionary, but you overhear that he's just one of those sad, lonely enthusiasts, who lives alone and polishes his helmet regularly. This spurs you on to win, but the joy is short-lived. Non-corporeal, cloaked alien Nerual Ttoille makes mincemeat out of you.

You try your hand in 'friendlies' against the remaining two opponents, but are easily overcome: Princess Bejin uses her telekinetic powers to serve impossible shots, while Biff Raunch's powerful playing style appears unbeatable. The bar droid shuffles over, beeping at you in tones that would make R2D2 accuse him of stealing his best lines. You notice that he's a standard shuffleboard-training robot, and you settle down for a night of practice. "I'll beat these guys," you think. "I'll show them."

And so it goes in one of the very best games to grace the Mac Plus – a platform hardly known for its gaming prowess. This, in part, was down to the limitations of the hardware. While the Amiga wowed with its thousands of colours, the humble Macs of the mid-to-late-Eighties mostly had to make do with built-in 9-inch monochrome displays. But with careful use of shading, detail and animation, visual magic could be eked from the platform. This is most certainly the case with *Shufflepuck Cafe*, which is full of character. Its numerous neat details – the inebriated Smythe-Worthington hiccupping and then falling under the table upon losing; Vinnie the Dweeb's dumb hippy salute upon winning a point; the jeers and boos as you're knocked out of the championship – ensure Brøderbund's offering manages to transcend typical '*Pong*' games (after all, *Shufflepuck Cafe* is, essentially, a pseudo-3D cross between air-hockey and Atari's ageing bat-and-ball game), despite the limitations of the hardware.

> WHILE THE AMIGA WOWED WITH ITS THOUSANDS OF COLOURS, THE HUMBLE MACS OF THE MID-TO-LATE-EIGHTIES MOSTLY HAD TO MAKE DO WITH BUILT-IN 9-INCH MONOCHROME DISPLAYS

Ultimately, though, it's an aspect of the Mac's default hardware setup that's largely responsible for the game's success: all Macs – even back then – make heavy use of a mouse for controlling pretty much every aspect of the interface, and *Shufflepuck Cafe* is quite simply the game your mouse was made for. Forget clicking on myriad icons in *Civilisation*-style games, moving your line of sight in a first-person shooter, or yanking puzzle pieces around in some *Bejeweled* knock-off – Brøderbund's effort is where it's at for mouse-based gaming. As you wrench your mouse across the desk, the paddle follows your every move, and you soon become at one with the action on the tiny Mac screen, sometimes coming perilously close to Wii-controller-meets-televsion-screen-style shenanigans. It just feels so right and so natural; there's nothing to learn – the control system just works. And there's another plus-side to the game – the Mac Plus is one of the tidiest little systems around, and not only is it smaller than the vast majority of PCs and Macs released since, it takes up significantly less room than an air-hockey table and a bunch of drunken oddballs.



» Princess Bejin inexplicably turned into a chav, suddenly yelling: "Talk to the hand!"

D-PAD DISASTER

The Mac Plus was not a games machine. Despite a few classics emerging on the platform, it was typically lumbered with shabby conversions of the era's popular titles. However, *Shufflepuck Cafe* gave Apple's wee computer a form of revenge against one of the most popular games machines of all, adding into the bargain a handy lesson for games developers everywhere: when a control system is key to a game's success, changing it is a very dangerous proposition. It was the NES conversion that came in for a hammering. Despite including the original's characters and prettying up the graphics, it clearly didn't occur to the developers that the NES lacked a mouse. Without it, the game proves an unrewarding, frustrating experience – when even Vinnie the Dweeb can kick your arse, due to your paddle moving at about the same speed as an asthmatic slug, it rapidly becomes clear that the system isn't cut out for this kind of game.

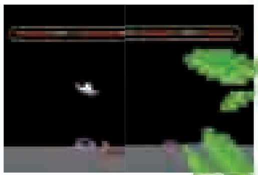


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

LODE RUNNER
SYSTEMS: FROM VIC-20 TO ATARI ST
YEAR: 1982–1983

CHOPLIFTER
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS 8-BITS
YEAR: 1982–1987

PRINCE OF PERSIA
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS 8- AND 16-BITS
YEAR: 1989–1993W



WONDERSWAN

THE WONDERSWAN IS A CLASSIC PIECE OF JAPANESE INGENUITY THAT MANAGED TO SECURE A PROFITABLE NICHE IN A MARKETPLACE DOMINATED BY THE MIGHTY NINTENDO. KIM WILD TAKES A LOOK AT THE HANDHELD THAT FEW OUTSIDE OF JAPAN HAVE EVER PLAYED.



Bandai was originally founded in 1950 by Naoharu Yamashina under the name of Bandai-ya. The Japanese pronunciation of the phrase is Bandai fueki, meaning "eternally unchanging". In those days, Bandai was responsible for manufacturing toy cars and plastic models. During the Seventies and Eighties, Bandai manufactured hundreds of LCD handheld games based on popular TV programs, branching out into the world of toy figures such as Digimon, Gundam and Astro Boy. It is also well known for its series of Tamagotchi virtual pet games. A merger between Bandai and Sega was rumoured but nothing came of it, with Bandai choosing to enter the videogame market alone.

While at Nintendo, Gunpey Yokoi was famed for creating the original Game Boy and producing titles such as *Metroid* and *Kid Icarus*. When Gunpey Yokoi came up with the Virtual Boy, which spectacularly bombed, he left Nintendo to form his own company in 1996. It was while at his new firm Koto that he was approached by Bandai to create a new handheld to compete with his previous creation, the Game Boy Color. Sadly in 1997, Gunpey Yokoi was involved in a car accident, which had a fatal outcome. While examining the damage of two motor vehicles at the side of the road with businessman Etsuo Kis , another car driven by Iwao Tsushima slammed into them. Iwao Tsushima, his wife and Etsuo Kiso all survived with minor injuries but Gunpey Yokoi did not, depriving the videogame industry of one of its leading lights.

On 4 March 1999, the WonderSwan launched in a variety of colours including Pearl White, Skeleton Green, Silver Metallic, Skeleton Red/Pink, Blue Metallic, Skeleton Blue, Skeleton Black, Camouflage, and Gold, with special two tone models Frozen Mint, Sherbet Melon and Soda Blue. These colours were chosen as a result of an online poll at Bandai's website, with the metallic models and Pearl White discontinued on 22 July to make room for the special tone models. Interestingly, the Skeleton Pink colour wasn't popular among the Japanese, often selling at a discounted price to shift stock (proving that pink isn't necessarily the answer to attracting more gamers).

The WonderSwan itself is a nice sized system, proving fairly portable with a reasonable button layout that makes it comfortable to hold. For the first time since the Atari Lynx, the handheld features two sets of controls for horizontal and vertical play, which means that games like *Magical Drop* can be played in portrait mode as intended. Despite its mono display, graphics are clear and sharp (superior to the Game Boy) although it does suffer from some blurring during lots of

The Wonder of the Witch

WonderWitch (11,800 yen) was an amateur programming kit released for the handheld for those who knew C to create their own games. The package included a cartridge for storing games, a CD of applications for the PC and a cable for connecting the WonderSwan and PC together. To encourage development, a competition was hosted offering publication for the winner and prize money for runners-up. The winner of the 2001 competition was *Judgment Silversword*, the prize being a commercial boxed release of the game. A sequel was uploaded to the author's website (http://members2.jcom.home.ne.jp/jss2/recycle.htm) but is only compatible with the Wonder Witch software and doesn't work with emulators. In 2002, RPG game *Dicing Knight* won the competition also went on to receive commercial publication and can still be purchased at the author's website (http://www20.cds.ne.jp/~murasame/games). 2003 was the last ever competition.



THE JAPANESE PRONUNCIATION OF THE PHRASE, BANDAI-YA, IS BANDAI FUEKI, MEANING "ETERNALLY UNCHANGING"



Year released: 1999

Original price: 4,800 yen

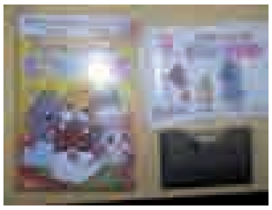
Buy it now for: £10+ dependant on model

Associated magazines: None

Why the WonderSwan was great… Its large battery life, stylish design and wide range of software from the likes of Data East, Squaresoft, Capcom and Konami means that there are plenty of hidden gems to uncover.



WONDERSWAN



» *Doko Demo Hamster 3*, a charming pet simulator. The cartridges fit into the back of the handheld and have a stylish case.



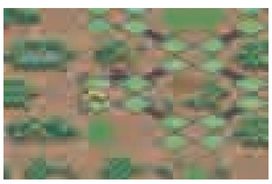
» This flash cart proved that piracy was also a threat to the console, although they could also run home-brew software.



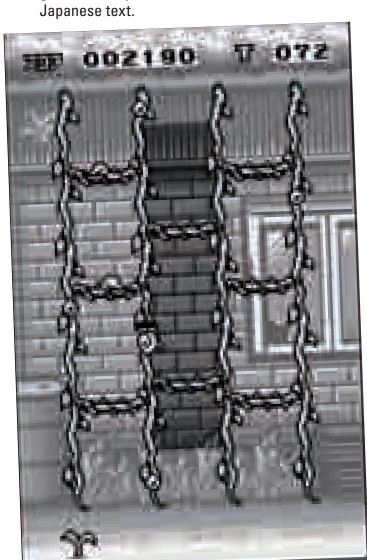
» *Tare Panda Gunpey* set, which included the game and a themed console in a presentation box.



» The original mono WonderSwan is larger than the following Color and Crystal models.



» *Blue Wing Blitz*, a beautiful strategy game from Square that was full of Japanese text.



» *Tane-wo-maku Tori*: direct water droplets to the seed. The boxed-version also includes a hardback picture book.

movement. Sound is controlled with one button and has just three settings, a contrast wheel for the screen display and a power button. Using one AA battery (that sticks out of the enclosed casing) over 40 hours of play can be enjoyed, the longest of any handheld machine to date. An expansion port is included for use with other devices.

The system itself has its downsides; the control system isn't ideal for left-handers, the lack of a headphone jack means an adapter has to be purchased to experience decent sound quality and the AC port is noticeably missing, meaning it is a battery-only machine. It's also physically impossible to play a two-player link up game with the headphones in place, as there is only sufficient space for one lead. Due to its low price, the casing is like a cheap plastic, although later releases would improve on this area. The weirdest aspect of the WonderSwan and all its models is that it doesn't do anything when you turn it on without a game inside, giving the wrong impression of the machine being broken. Sometimes the pins of WonderSwan games have to be cleaned with an alcoholic-based solution, as they are prone to slipping out slightly from the console.

Facing steep competition with Nintendo, the original WonderSwan model managed to sell 1.55 million units, an impressive figure given it was only sold in Japan and some import stores. Weekly sales from Magic Box at the time stated that the WonderSwan was second to the Game Boy Color, with the Neo Geo Pocket/Color and earlier Game Boy iterations lagging behind. On the game's launch, *Densha De Go* sold over 200,000 copies in one week and made it one of the bestselling titles in Japan at the time. *Makaimura* (known as *Ghosts And Goblins* in the West) and *Detective Conan* games were also popular, selling out upon their launch.

IN 2000, BANDAI SIGNED AN AGREEMENT WITH MATTEL TO BRING THE HANDHELD TO NORTH AMERICA, BUT THE DOMINANCE OF NINTENDO PROMPTED A CHANGE OF HEART

A WORLD OF COLOUR

In 2000, Bandai signed an agreement with Mattel to bring the handheld to North America, but the dominance of Nintendo prompted a change of heart. Later that year, the WonderSwan Color was announced after Nintendo Spaceworld, promising a 2.9" screen that could use up to 241 colours, implementing backwards-compatibility with all WonderSwan releases working on the handheld. The recent unveiling of the Game Boy Advance, however, meant it had a tough



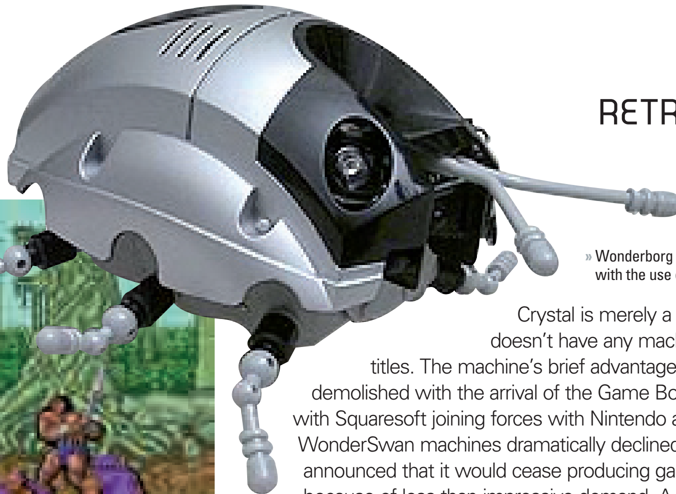
» The lack of a headphone socket means that an adapter has to be purchased.



» Although a key feature, the WonderSwan and PS2 link-up was barely used.



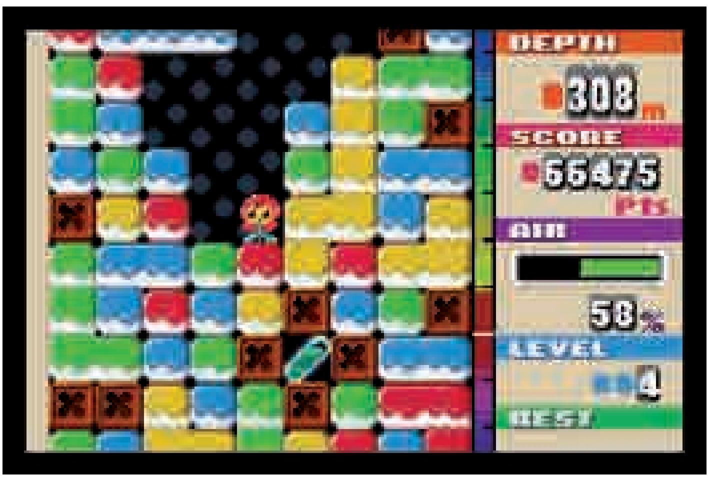
» *Riveria* appeared on GBA, but the game originally appeared on WonderSwan entirely in Japanese.



» Wonderborg – a remote-controlled robot with the use of a WonderSwan handheld.



» Even *Golden Axe* received an impressive conversion, although it was fair to say that the controls could be a bit cumbersome.



» Well known franchises like *Mr Driller* made the WonderSwan very appealing.

fight to compete from the outset. For a time it was rumoured that black and white games played in a colour model would be updated visually like the Game Boy Color but this never occurred, with any mono games displayed as originally intended. Interestingly, at a trade show, Bandai showcased the WonderSwan's link up mode with the PlayStation 2 (the WonderWave), although it was never made clear as to what this would involve or what titles would support it. Net access through a mobile phone network was also possible like its predecessor. Bandai's plan to sell at a much cheaper price point than the impending Game Boy Advance (6,800 yen to the GBA's muted 9,800) was aimed to attract as many new gamers as possible and give the machine a head-start. Promises of re-makes of Square's *Final Fantasy* titles were also very enticing to an RPG mad nation.

Launched 30 December 2000, the machine proved popular and Bandai managed to take 8% of the market share in Japan due to its cheap price tag. Machines were available in Crystal Glass Black, Crystal Glass Blue, Crystal Glass Orange, Pearl Blue and Pearl Pink. Designed exactly the same as its predecessor but with a colour screen, display suffers from the same visibility problems as the Game Boy Color in inadequate lighting. Buttons are re-labelled for ease of use while battery life shrinks to 20 hours on one AA.

The Bandai WonderSwan Crystal was released on 7 December 2002 and updated the model by using a TFT screen instead of FSTN for a much brighter display, removing some of the motion-blurring present in previous versions. Colours launched were Wine Red, Blue Violet, Crystal Black, and Crystal Blue. Its casing was also made smaller out of more durable materials and refined with revamped buttons. The power button is now a slide switch, preventing accidental knocks to the machine from turning it on or off. Battery life was about 15 hours which was still quite impressive, although not as impressive as the original's mammoth 40 hours. Unlike the WonderSwan Color which was a new console in its own right, the Crystal is merely a redesign and doesn't have any machine-specific titles. The machine's brief advantage was soon demolished with the arrival of the Game Boy Advance, and with Squaresoft joining forces with Nintendo again, sales of WonderSwan machines dramatically declined. In 2003, Bandai announced that it would cease producing game hardware because of less than impressive demand. A backlit machine was rumoured but never came to fruition.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Although the WonderSwan wasn't an outstanding success sales-wise in comparison to the Game Boy, some of gaming's most popular franchises helped its prospects. Bandai did a terrific job of releasing its own software, coming up with countless *Digimon*, *Gundam*, *Inyusha* and *One Piece* titles that were exclusive to the WonderSwan. Sammy released the successful *Guilty Gear Petite 1* and *2*, Taito came up with conversions of *Space Invaders*, *Puzzle Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands*, Capcom brought out two notable *Rockman* (*Megaman*) titles, while Namco released the excellent *Kaze no Klonoa Moonlight Museum* (*Klonoa*). Squaresoft worked wonders with the machine, remaking *Final Fantasy I*, *II* and *IV* with better graphics and added abilities, with even more RPGs released including *Romancing Saga*, *Front Mission* (complete with English menus for import fans) and exclusives *Blue Wing Blitz* and *X Card*. Sadly, development on *Final Fantasy III* began but was never finished. Although big names were contributing to the WonderSwan's early success, not enough supported it, preferring instead to focus on Nintendo's brood.

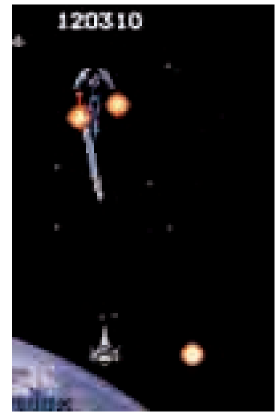
Judgment Silversword, an excellent 2D shooter (see WonderWitch boxout) is incredibly rare due to a small print run of 500, regularly fetching £70-100 on eBay. Konami's *Beatmania* isn't especially rare, but the inclusion of a mini-turntable as a controller makes it highly sought after. Some games like *Tane wo Maku Tori* came with limited edition storybooks, increasing their desirability.

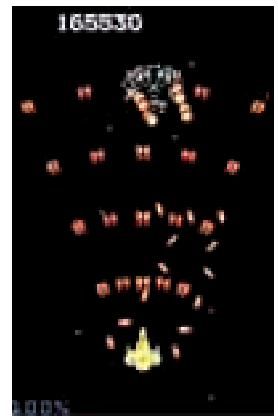
What makes the WonderSwan unique are the innovative accessories available, manufactured by Bandai and distributed by Sammy. Although there were the usual external lights, headphone adapters, link cables and rechargeable batteries, you could also get a Digimon Connector for communication between certain games and the WonderCoin, a plastic device that fits over the directional pads for more accurate play. Handy Sonar came out in 1999 as an add-on for the WonderSwan to allow fishermen to see underwater. The WonderGate turned the handheld into an internet device by connecting to a mobile phone. It would allow basic web access, provide an email program and enable the user to download basic mini-games from dedicated websites, with *SD Gundam: Episode 1* being the first game to use the service.

One of the most impressive add-ons is the WonderBorg, a programmable robot. Shaped like an insect, the WonderSwan handheld acts as the remote control by using the dedicated IR port and cartridges provided Wonderborg. The cartridges are in English (manuals are part Japanese) so programming the robot is for those who wish to import.

Special Edition packs were also sold, which usually consisted of a game, a console with a themed appearance and a presentation box. Popular boxsets included *Final Fantasy* (all white with phrases written on the handheld), *Tarepan Gunpey* (black and white panda theme), *Chocobo Mysterious Dungeon* (yellow and orange) and *Gundam* (predominantly green).

To this day, Bandai remains a successful company, still manufacturing toys for franchises like Power Rangers and Hello Kitty while also creating many titles for the videogame market, such as Tamagotchi Corner Shop. It is inconceivable that Bandai will ever re-enter the world of console hardware, but what it managed with the WonderSwan was impressive given the competition. The low price even today makes it more than worthy of consideration.

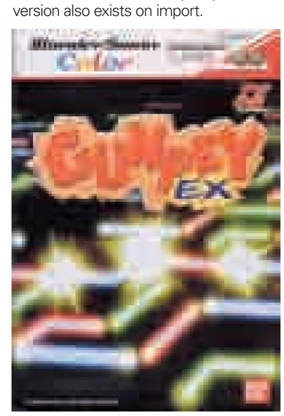




» *Judgement Silversword*, a terrific 2D shooter that commands prices in excess of £70.

Gunpey Lives On

The death of Gunpey Yokoi in 1997 meant that he sadly never got to see the final hardware release of his creation. In commemoration of the inventor, the launch game *Gunpey* was named after him. *Gunpey* is an addictive puzzle game where tiles are connected from one side of the board to the other, making these disappear before they get pushed to the top of the screen. The concept would be re-used in *Tarepan Gunpey*, exactly the same game but featuring pandas. A sequel appeared in the form of *Gunpey Ex*, completely in colour and with different themes. Tetsuya Mizuguchi (mastermind behind *Lumines*, *Space Channel 5*, *Sega Rally Championship*) has remade the game for Nintendo DS and Sony PSP, with the DS version already receiving admirable reviews for adding unlockable content, themed backgrounds and plentiful music. A little known Sony PlayStation version also exists on import.

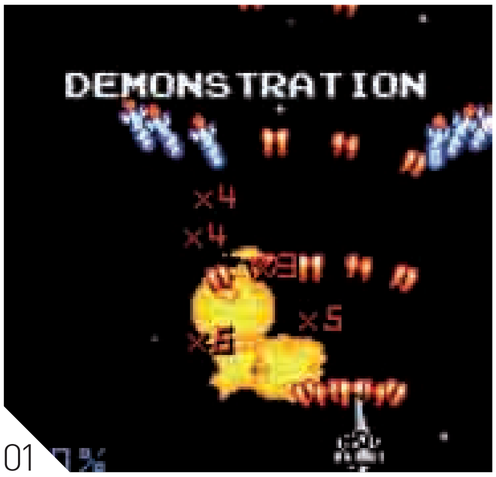


Acknowledgements to planetwonderswan for some images.

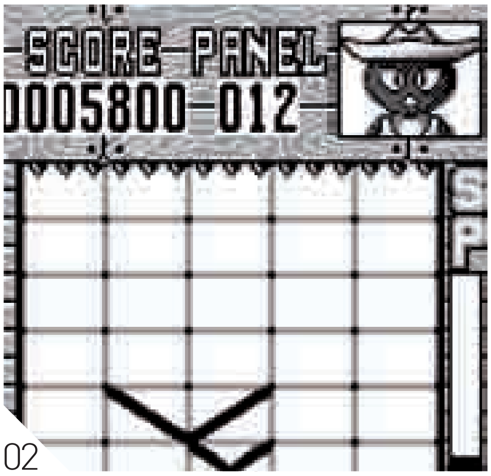
WONDERSWAN

PERFECT TEN GAMES

Eagerly hankering after your own WonderSwan now? Well here are ten titles that are so good, they should find their way into every owner's collection.



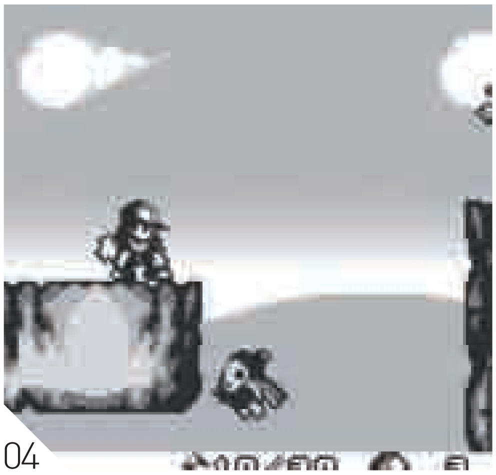
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02



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04

JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

» **RELEASED:** 2004 (CREATED 2001)

» **PUBLISHED BY:** QUTE

» **CREATED BY:** QUTE

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** N/A

01 **Yes, we've already mentioned this in copious detail in the main WonderSwan article, but it's such a great game that it deserves a place within this section.** *Judgement Silversword* is a 2D vertical shoot-'em-up set in outer space with your ship equipped with two weapons and a defence shield. With a gradually increasing difficulty level, plenty of action and lots of high scoring opportunities, it's a great game for any 2D shooter fan. The fact that the game is in English is a bonus. Its rarity means that unless you're prepared to pay the steep price tag, you'll be playing it on emulator in the meantime.

GUNPEY

» **RELEASED:** 1999

» **PUBLISHED BY:** BANDAI

» **CREATED BY:** BANDAI

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MONSTER PARTY

02 **Although the sequel is in full colour and is technically superior, we're plumping for the original game as it came first and comes with a Wild West theme that helps to give everything a little more personality.** *Gunpey* is a puzzle title that sees you having to move a series of lines up or down the screen to create a full line, with combos of pieces achieving higher scores. Like many decent puzzlers, it's extremely simple to get the hang of and has plenty of modes for replay value. Oh and it's in English. As an original boxed copy can be acquired quite cheaply (£5-10) – it's an essential game for your collection that has recently been released on both the Nintendo DS and Sony PSP.

MR DRILLER

» **RELEASED:** 2001

» **PUBLISHED BY:** BANDAI

» **CREATED BY:** NAMCO

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** RIDGE RACER, SOUL CALIBUR, PAC-MAN

03 **Many gamers will have already encountered *Mr Driller*, it having been ported to many consoles over the years, but for those who haven't, you're in for a real treat.** Mr Driller has to prevent the world being overrun by colourful blocks and does so by, er, drilling his way down through them. Capsules of air have to be collected in order to keep him alive and while ploughing through blocks, you have to make sure falling debris doesn't crush you. It's not the most comprehensive version in the series (only 500m, 1000m and 2000m levels are included) but if you haven't already experienced the joys of *Mr Driller*, it remains an absolutely essential purchase.

KLONOA: MOONLIGHT MUSEUM

» **RELEASED:** 1999

» **PUBLISHED BY:** BANDAI

» **CREATED BY:** NAMCO

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** TEKKEN

04 **Although this game has been remade for the Game Boy Advance, *Moonlight Museum* is still worth seeking out for platform fans.** Each level involves Klonoa grabbing enemies and using them to vault while having to collect a number of gems to open the end of level doorway. As the game progresses, puzzle elements kick in, where you have to locate keys in order to progress. The game makes clever use of the WonderSwan's hardware by having the perspective switch from vertical to horizontal for certain levels. Like many *Klonoa* titles it's fairly easy but has superb replay value and is cute as a button.

RHYME RIDER KERORICAN

» **RELEASED:** 1999

» **PUBLISHED BY:** BANDAI

» **CREATED BY:** NANA ON SHA

» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PARAPPA THE RAPPER

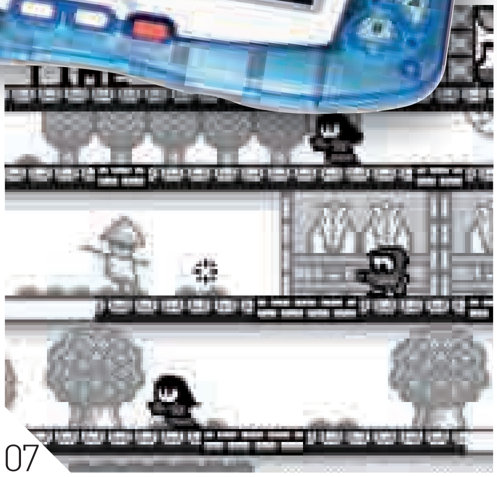
05 **While boasting an odd name, *Rhyme Rider* is actually a great rhythm action title that deserves your full attention.** It has a unique visual style full of vibrant colours, with the game world featuring a host of strange creatures that are jumped over by pressing the correct button(s) in time to the beat. With only four levels, it's on the short side, but like many Bemani titles, the addictive gameplay keep you coming back for more. The in-game instructions are Japanese, but the boxed edition comes with a set of cards showing a picture of a creature along with the correct button combinations, making it easy to know what to do.

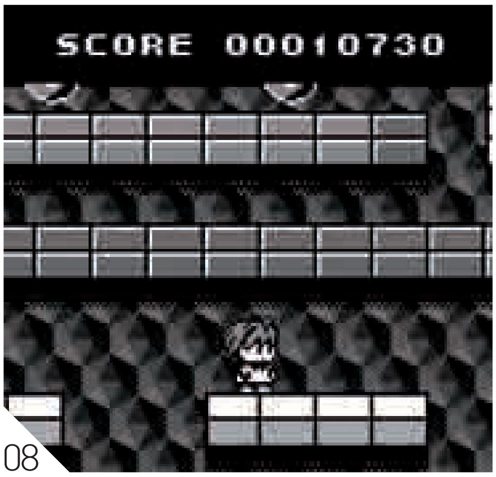



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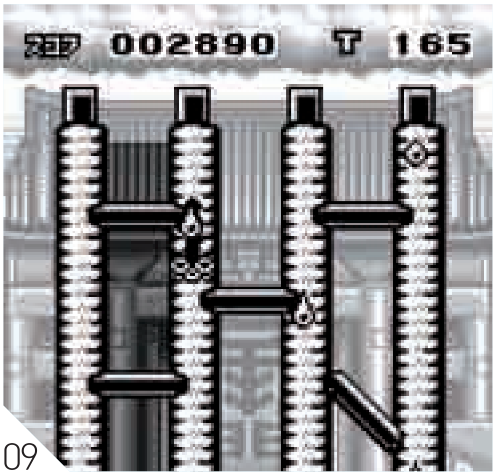


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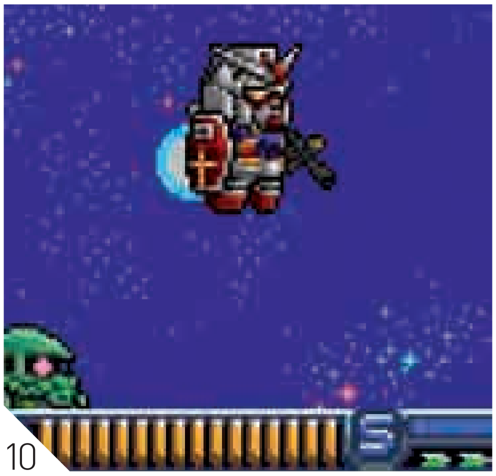

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ONE PIECE: GRAND BATTLE SWAN COLOSSEUM

» **RELEASED:** 2002
» **PUBLISHED BY:** BANDAI
» **CREATED BY:** DIMPS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC ADVANCE

06 **This franchise is only just starting to filter through to these shores, but in Japan it's a popular Anime series that has seen many videogame tributes on a variety of different systems.** *Swan Colosseum* is one of the better titles for the Wonderswan and is a 2D fighting game reminiscent of *Guilty Gear*. Asides from being easy to start with, the inventive range of moves for each character gives the game depth. One of the best fighting titles on the system, so adventurers and owners of the machine should rightly lap it up.

GANSO JAJAMURA KUN

» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **PUBLISHED BY:** BANDAI
» **CREATED BY:** JALECO
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** P-47: THE FREEDOM FIGHTER

07 **An arcade classic from Jaleco, this is one game that is easy to play and hard to put down.** As a ninja, the aim is to defeat the enemies on each platform within the time limit, moving up the screen by jumping under specific blocks to break them, while being careful not to come into contact with the on-screen foes. Upon defeat, the enemies' essences can be collected for extra points. Featuring penguins, frogs and one-eyed umbrellas, the enemies are typically odd-ball yet all the better for it. It's a game that's becoming increasingly difficult to find but thankfully doesn't prove too expensive to buy. Meaning that everyone can enjoy it.

RAINBOW ISLANDS PUTTY'S PARTY

» **RELEASED:** 2000
» **PUBLISHED BY:** BANDAI
» **CREATED BY:** TAITO
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BUBBLE BOBBLE, SPACE INVADERS, RAINBOW ISLANDS

08 **A unique game in the long running franchise, *Rainbow Islands* instead features female character Putty as the main star (along with a pixie-like creature called Naughty) rather than Bub or Bob (although they crop up in the storyline as Bubby and Bobby) who has the added ability of jumping really high along with throwing rainbows as a weapon or staircase.** Although black and white, the formula is as playable as ever and remains the same: make your way to the top of the screen using the power of the rainbow before moving onto the next level. Addictive stuff.

TANE_WO_ MAKU_TORI

» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **PUBLISHED BY:** BANDAI
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CHOANIKI

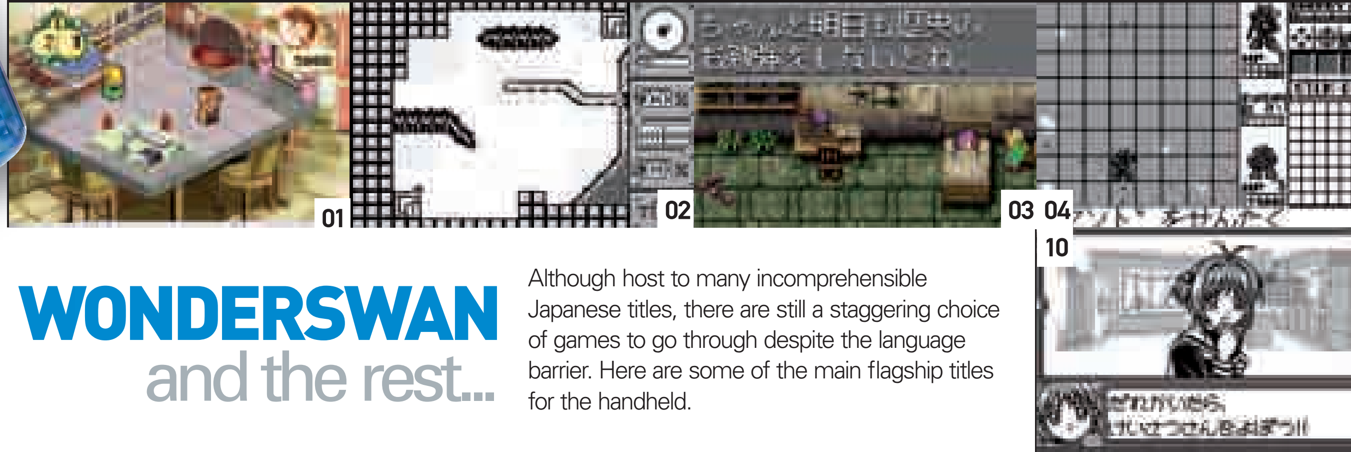
09 **An arcade/puzzle title, which is enchanting once you progress through the first few, rather tricky levels.** The main aim of the game is to guide the falling raindrops to the seed of a flower through a maze by moving the platforms. Once the flower has blossomed, the bird flies down to feed and it's time to move onto the next level. As levels become more difficult, enemies such as snails will gobble up the water, thus making your life extremely difficult. Fail to complete a level within the time limit and the game is over. The boxed version comes with a small hardback book that features drawings and text from the game's intro, making it collectible.

SD GUNDAM OPERATION U.C

» **RELEASED:** 2002
» **PUBLISHED BY:** BANDAI
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** HUNTER X HUNTER

10 **One of the few *Gundam* titles that isn't impossible to play due to the language barrier, *Operation U.C* is a scrolling shooter featuring lots of huge robots and gigantic space ships.** Your main character has a gun for long distance combat and a sword for close-up encounters, and the non-stop action constantly keeps you on your toes. Successful battles enable you to level up, although losing a life means starting the whole thing from scratch. It features what looks like a story/adventure mode, a shooting mode of levels played one after another and a VS mode, with one to one combat against the computer or a human player.





WONDERSWAN
and the rest...

Although host to many incomprehensible Japanese titles, there are still a staggering choice of games to go through despite the language barrier. Here are some of the main flagship titles for the handheld.

01 ALCHEMIST MARIE AND ELLIE
02 ANCHOR FIELD Z
03 ARC THE LAD
04 ARMOURED UNIT
05 BAKUSOU DEKATORA DENETSU
06 BISTRO RECIPE
07 BLUE WING BLITZ
08 BOKAN DENETSU (TIME BOKAN SERIES)
09 BUFFERS EVOLUTION
10 CARD CAPTURE SAKURA
11 CRAZY CLIMBER
12 CHAOS GEAR
13 CHOCOBO MYSTERIOUS DUNGEON
14 CHOU ANIKI- OTOKO NO TAMAFUNDA
15 CLOCK TOWER
16 DARK EYES: BATTLE GATE
17 DENSHA DE GO
18 DIGIMON TAMERS: BATTLE SPIRIT
19 DIGIMON TAMERS MEDLEY
20 DOKODEMO HAMSTER
21 DOKODEMO HAMSTER 3
22 POCKET NO NAKA NO DOREAMON
23 DRAGONBALL
24 SD GUNDAM EMOTIONAL JAM
25 ENGACHO!
26 FEVER PACHINKO
27 FINAL FANTASY
28 FINAL FANTASY II
29 FINAL FANTASY IV
30 FINAL LAP 2000
31 FINAL LAP SPECIAL
32 FIRE PRO WRESTLING
33 FLASH
34 FRONT MISSION
35 MIKENEKO HOLMES GHOST PANIC
36 GLOBAL HEXCITE
37 GOLDEN AXE
38 GUILTY GEAR PETITE 2
39 GUNDAM VOL 1: SIDE 7
40 HANAFUDA
41 HANJYUKA HERO
42 HAROBOTS
43 HATARAKU CHOCOBO
44 INUYUSHA
45 GANSO JAMURA KUN
46 JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD
47 KINNIKU MAN SECOND GENERATION DREAM TAG MATCH
48 KLONOA: MOONLIGHT MUSEUM
49 KURUPARA!
50 LAST STAND
51 LAST ALIVE
52 LODE RUNNER
53 MACROSS: TRUE LOVE STORY
54 MAKAIMURA (GHOSTS AND GOBLINS)
55 MEMORIES OF FESTA
56 MINGLE MAGNET
57 MR DRILLER
58 GOMOKU NARABE AND REVERSI
59 NARUTO
60 NAZO OU POCKET
61 NEON GENESIS EVANGELION SHITO IKUSEI
62 OEKAKI PUZZLE LOGIC
63 ONE PIECE: NIJI NO SHIMA DENETSU
64 ONE PIECE: GRAND BATTLE SWAN COLLOSEUM
65 SD GUNDAM: OPERATION UC
66 POCKET FIGHTER
67 PUYO PUYO
68 PUZZLE BOBBLE
69 RAKU JONGG
70 RHYME RIDER KERORIKAN
71 RIVIERA
72 ROCKMAN AND FORTE (MEGAMAN)
73 ROCKMAN EXE (MEGAMAN)
74 ROMANCING SAGA
75 SENKOU MILLENIUM
76 SLITHERLINK
77 SOCCER YAROU-CHALLENGE THE WORLD
78 SOROBANGU
79 SPACE INVADERS
80 STAR HEARTS
81 STREET DANCER
82 TANGO
83 TARE PAN GUNPEI
84 TEKKEN CARD CHALLENGE
85 TAN NO MAKU TORI
86 TURNTABLIST: DJ BATTLE
87 WILD CARD




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AFTER BURNER II

"I FEEL THE NEED, THE NEED FOR SPEED"





» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £60+ PCB BOARD

HISTORY



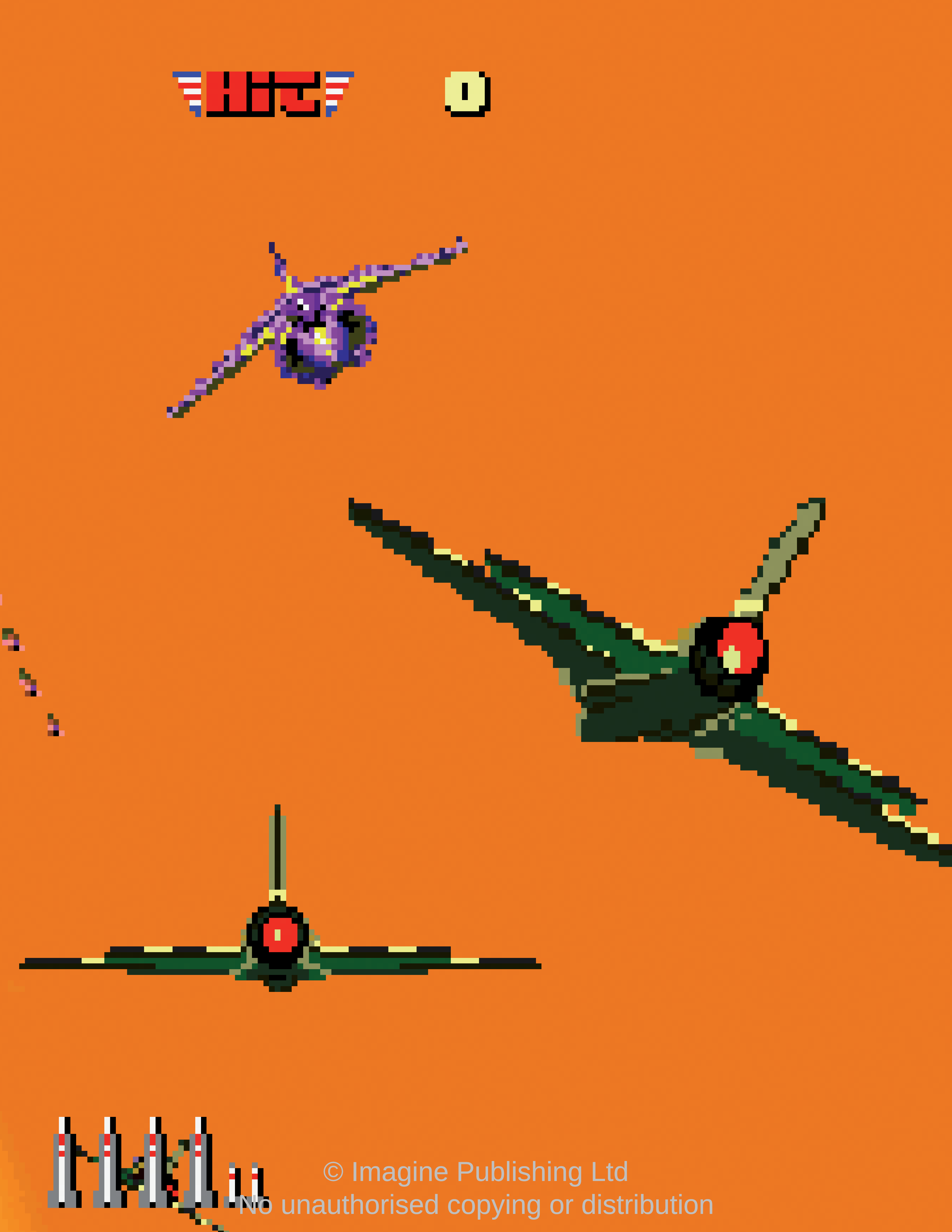
Let's face it. *After Burner* was cool. In fact to a 13-year-old teenager (god I'm old) it was quite possibly the coolest game ever made. Sure it could be argued that *Space Harrier* had already beaten *After Burner* to the coolness punch, with its near identical graphical style and gut-wrenchingly vast gameplay, but as cool as flying through the skies with a huge laser cannon tucked under your arms may be, it's nowhere near as cool as mowing down enemy jets with a state of the art F-14 Tomcat.

Granted, it may have been an incredibly simple game – shoot down some planes, then shoot down some more, before finally shooting down a few more – but it was *After Burner*'s sheer simplicity that made it such a joy to play, especially if you were lucky enough to be strapped into one of the huge hydraulic cabinets.

With Tom Cruise's *Top Gun* still fresh in my mind (my parents let me watch anything on video, regardless of its actual age rating) *After Burner* was finally my chance to play that smug, grinning git and boy did it feel good.

Thanks to its massive screen, chunky joystick and that aforementioned huge hydraulic seat, *After Burner* was a more than welcome follow-up to *Out Run* and *Space Harrier* and proved that Suzuki had lost none of his magic. From the thrill of taking out an enemy formation with a bunch of well-timed missiles to the horror of desperately trying to shake a tailing plane as it tried to shoot you down, *After Burner* was a non-stop rollercoaster ride of excitement that only slowed down for an occasional refuel or landing. And even those were special because you'd see the occasional homage to past Suzuki titles, like the *Out Run* car that races alongside your Tomcat as it takes off.

Yup, *After Burner* was incredibly cool and remains one of Sega's finest blasters – little wonder then that it has taken a good 19 years for Sega to come up with an arcade sequel – *After Burner Climax* – that finally does it justice. Now how do you get to London's Trocadero?


0

THE MAKING OF...

ARMALYTE

The autumn of 1988 saw the home computer conversions of R-Type hit the shelves and the horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up became the "in thing". Cyberdyne Systems appeared from nowhere with its debut game Armalyte, and the public loved it. Andrew Fisher talks to Dan Phillips, Robin Levy and John Kemp about creating the classic Commodore 64 game.



» No it's not an ED 209 but you can certainly see where the inspiration for this terrifying walker came from.

"Dan and I were in the same year at school, we both had Commodore 64s when most of the other kids had Spectrums," laughs John Kemp, one half of *Armalyte*'s coding team. "Robin was in the year below us so we didn't really hook up with him until college. We used to go to the arcades to play *Salamander* and *NARC*, and hung around in "Computerware", a little games and equipment shop that wasn't too far from Exeter College. We all loved playing games, and Robin's artwork gave us the belief that we could put out our own polished game." Rob Stevens (the programmer of *Barbarian II*) introduced them to John Harries, who joined the team and they named themselves Cyberdyne Systems, which came from the company in *The Terminator* movies.

Dan Phillips jumps in and reveals that originally, the team actually wanted to test their mettle on a certain arcade conversion… "We were at a show looking to try and get a contract to do the C64 version of *Salamander* by talking to a guy at Konami," he begins. "He informed us that it had already gone to Pete Baron, so we headed over to the ZZAP stand where we got talking to Julian Rignall and Steve Jarratt. They said we should talk to Paul Cooper who was running Thalamus, so we left our demo and contact details."

Then fate threw a spanner in the works. Activision/Mediagenic had the rights to convert the Irem coin-op *R-Type*, and began an aggressive legal campaign against any clones. The major casualty was *Katakis* by Rainbow Arts, as Phillips points out, "We were asked to prove that we had come up with the idea for



> "THE IRONIC THING WAS THAT WE DIDN'T REALLY LIKE R-TYPE; SALAMANDER AND ITS TWO-PLAYER ACTION WAS MUCH BETTER" DAN PHILLIPS



» *Armalyte's* distinct look easily made it stand apart from similar horizontal shooters.

the game before we had even seen *R-Type*. The ironic thing was that we didn't really like *R-Type*; *Salamander* and its two-player action was much better." However, the indestructible "probe" that helps a single player in *Armalyte* is reminiscent of *R-Type*.

BUILDING BLOCKS

The project started out as Starburst, became Manowar and then Magnox. John Harries, inspired by a heavy metal song, finally suggested *Armalyte*. The initial bas-relief style of graphics was replaced with a more crystalline look, before Robin Levy hit on the final organic/metallic combination. Screenshots taken from the three surviving demo versions show this change. "One of the reasons it went through so many re-designs is that I was learning how to draw graphics as I went and as such was always bettering myself whenever I did something new," reveals Levy. "Whenever I did do something slightly better I had to go back and make sure that those changes and techniques where implemented in earlier graphics – I wanted a level of consistency."

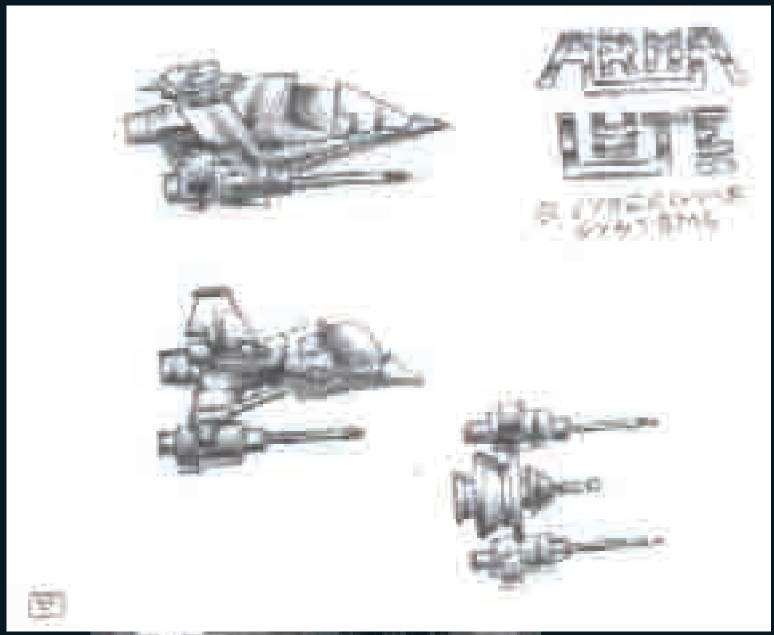
John Kemp, who was responsible for systems programming revealed the following. "I wrote the editors, like the character/level editor which allowed Robin to build characters and blocks for the level (on a 5x5 grid). He could then place his blocks on the level and check how it looked." *Armalyte*'s swirling attack waves were created with another of John's editors. "The sprite sequencer allowed us to load in a new level, design the attack waves and set sprite animations/colours, then "stick" them onto the scrolling background. Everything that the enemies did was controlled from editors so Robin had control over what the level looked like and how hard or easy it was. Each level was then checked with the game code so that glitches and difficulty could be tweaked."

Robin Levy's sketches and layouts from *Armalyte* can be seen here for the very first time. "For sprite animations I used a utility called Steve Beat's Sprite Editor. It was a very powerful tool that let you animate ranges in a variety of ways, save specific frames, see how sprites looked joined together or overlaid as well as define complex layouts that was handy for designing the larger bad guys. For the loading screen I used Vidcom."

Kemp coded the player ship movement, including the ability to push the second player into the landscape. "Robin kept saying, can we get it to be more varied, which is probably what started Dan's code streamlining." Phillips continues, "The basic systems were quite simple and we had some help from Rob Stevens – what took time was re-writing them to get them fast enough that we could run everything and still keep to 50 frames per second."

TESTING, TESTING...

Who had the most input on the design? "We all had input," continues Kemp. "Some ideas just sprang from arcade trips, other games, films etc. Robin's graphics mostly dictated what the level would be like, but we always knew there would be a level based on Geiger's *Alien* artwork for example, so we had to put in the exploding eggs. Some ideas came from the sprites themselves.



» Various concept sketches of the Armalyte ship.

IN THE KNOW



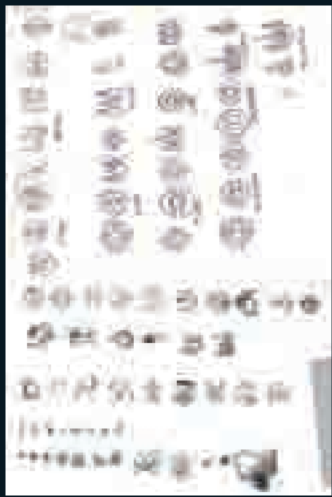
» **PUBLISHER:** THALAMUS

» **DEVELOPER:** CYBERDYNE SYSTEMS

» **RELEASED:** C64 VERSION 1988, AMIGA/ST CONVERSION 1991

» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

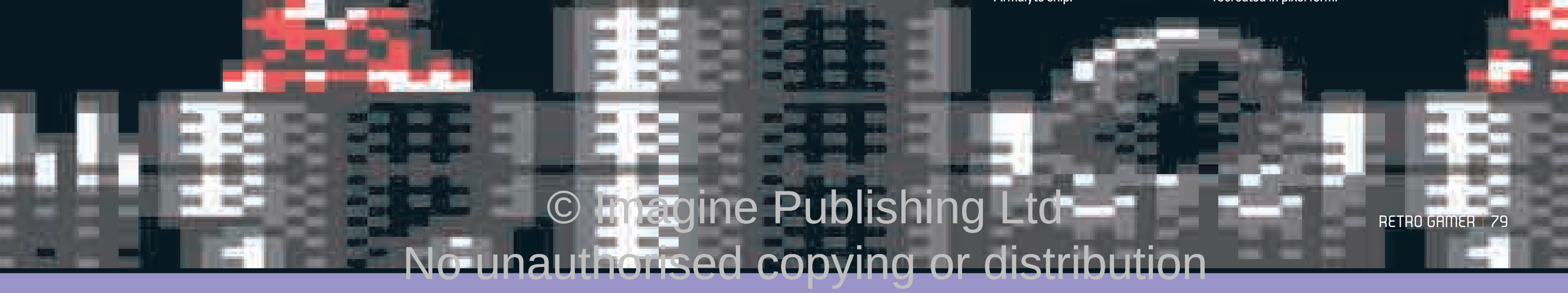
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3+



» Just a few of the many enemies that you'd end up facing in Thalamus' superb shooter.



» The whole of level one before it was eventually recreated in pixel form.



THE MAKING OF...

ARMALYTE

PUBLISHER HIGHLIGHTS

VENOM WING

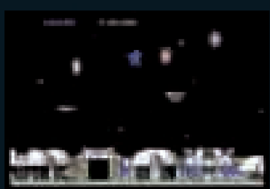
SYSTEMS: AMIGA

YEAR: 1990

RETROGRADE

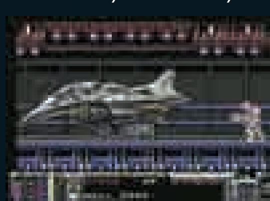
SYSTEMS: C64

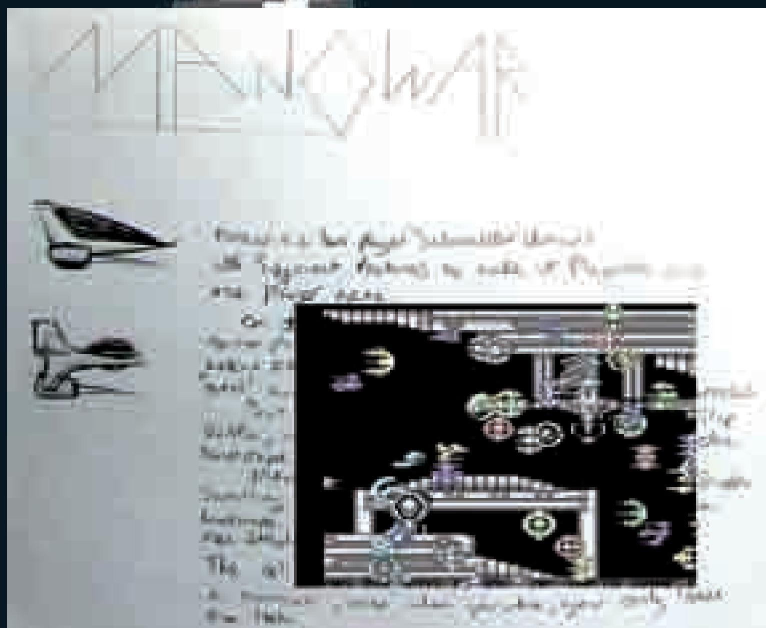
YEAR: 1990



MISSING IN ACTION

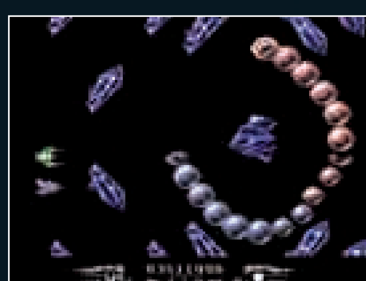
Armalyte's "competition edition" has the ability to select different starting levels. "It was mostly done for our own amusement, and there was talk of doing a special challenge at ZZAP Towers", says Phillips. *Armalyte* was re-released as a Kixx budget game, and finally as *Armalyte: The Final Run* on Amiga and Atari ST (by Arc Developments). A Spectrum version was advertised and a demo appeared on a Your Sinclair covertape. Work was started on a sequel. Among the planned new features were diagonal lasers, more types of enemy bullet and more weapon systems – with a shop letting the player decide which to use. But Cyberdyne moved as a team to System 3 and work started on a different title. "*Deadlock* was started and worked on for about 12 months," continues Phillips. It can be seen at 'Games That Weren't' – www.gtw64.co.uk, along with the demos of *Armalyte* and *Armalyte 2*.





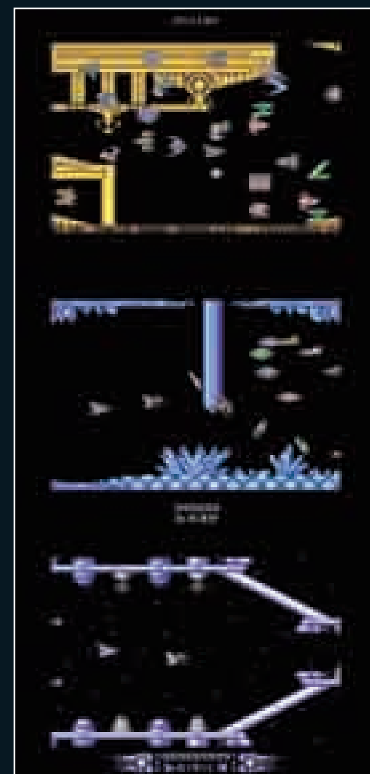
» As you can see from this inset, the final sprites perfectly captured the look of Levy's original sketches.

Walkers – they used to just walk, then, when they started moving and came across an obstacle – they walked through it. No, can't have that, it's just not right, they have to stop, or jump over. Ships going through the landscape? No chance, the player can't, you know the landscape is solid, so the enemies have to fly around it too." This attention to detail is what distinguished *Armalyte* from many similar games of the time. The super-weapon system was also unique, with charging batteries and three types of beam. Crystals were picked up to give a temporary shield, or blasted to yield extra power-ups – from forward and backward guns, to the *Delta*-style fish weapon and extra batteries.



» "Shoot those mother fu*cking snakes now," shouted Samuel L. Jackson when he worked as an *Armalyte* pilot.

So how much playtesting went into balancing the final version? "Hours and hours!" admits Phillips. "It's what drove us to keep making improvements, we'd play it and see it slow down or get killed by something unfair, make a few changes and fire it up again." Levy continues the story… "We tried to make sure that the game would come out in favour of the player. For instance, the player was allowed to overlap the background a little and move through any gap he could fire though, enemies would never go through the terrain or move so fast that you can't avoid them if you see them early enough, that sort of thing. However we still had a problem as we were playing the game for our own enjoyment. While that helped with the degree of love we poured into the game, it also meant that we were too close to the whole thing – especially when we started ramping up the difficulty because we were getting too good at it! I recall Julian Rignall saying that the first bit of the first level was too hard, and to make it almost impossible to get killed unless the player did something really dumb. I was dead against doing this at the time but we eventually succumbed and made a lot of changes throughout the game: reducing the accuracy of the bad guys, decreasing hits to kill, adding power-ups, widening gaps in terrain, etc. In retrospect it was probably still too hard the first time you loop the game... Oops."



» How the graphics of Armalyte evolved - from bas-relief to crystalline to the final metallic/organic look.

"WE COULD HAVE DONE IT IN HALF THE TIME IT ACTUALLY TOOK BUT WE ENJOYED PLAYING IT SO MUCH IT TOOK LONGER" DAN PHILLIPS



» A very rare glimpse of the unreleased Game Boy Advance version that Phillips would love to complete.

TEAMWORK

Martin Walker's "diary of a game" for Citadel in ZZAP mentions his musical work and playtesting on *Armalyte*. As well as providing four highly memorable tunes, Martin produced the well-tuned effects. A "priority" system makes sure the player hears important sounds. "At the time I really wasn't sure about the title music, "reveals Phillips. "The SFX were brilliant though and these days I have the title track as the ringtone on my phone."

Armalyte took nine months to complete. "We could have done it in half the time but we enjoyed playing it so much it took longer," Phillips jokes "I remember it as being mostly a good laugh, we'd work at my parents at night to cut down on disruptions", cuts in Kemp. "I remember Robin being so tired one night that he fell asleep while working, head down on the 1541 disk drive." Robin agrees: "We had our differences from time to time, some creative, some professional but we all pulled together for something we believed in. Martin Walker was also a calming influence and a wonderful source of feedback. In general there were loads of "funny" moments but I guess you had to be there and be awake for 24+ hours, after which you'd pretty much find anything funny."

One source of tension was the departure of programmer John Harries from the team, not long after contracts with Thalamus had been signed. "A close-knit team is the best place to work until you fall out," explains Phillips. "We fell out, one of the original guys left." John Harries went on to work at Thalamus while the game was being mastered, allowing him to slip a message (in black text on a black background) into the loading sequence.

THE HARD SELL

Thalamus was eager to cash in on the success of its previous game *Delta*, and so *Armalyte* gained the sub-title "Delta 2". Phillips' view is that "Paul Cooper reckoned it would lead to extra sales and as we all liked *Delta* we didn't see it as a bad thing." Levy wasn't concerned with the new name either. "We loved *Delta* when it first came out but we were chuffed that Thalamus deemed it good enough to be a sequel," he continues. "Personally I wasn't quite so happy with the decision to brand it so, even if it did give us a starting point for the game's scenario."

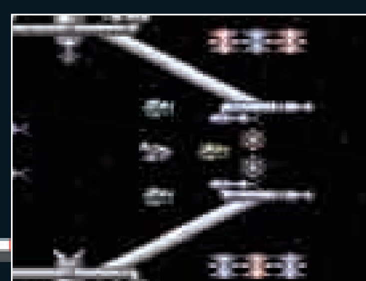
The planned appearance of a demo level on the ZZAP covertape did not happen. "The Thalamus Star" adverts had odd headlines such as "Aliens win the Olympics", with important facts like review scores and retail price. A more conventional advert featured the Oliver Frey cover artwork and the "Gold Rush II" competition. (See KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE)

Armalyte became a bestseller, but the royalties from Thalamus didn't last long. "The money was rubbish," reveals Phillips. What would he have done differently then? "I would have made the master version for duplication myself. I would have taken it to a proper publisher and got a decent amount of money out of it…"

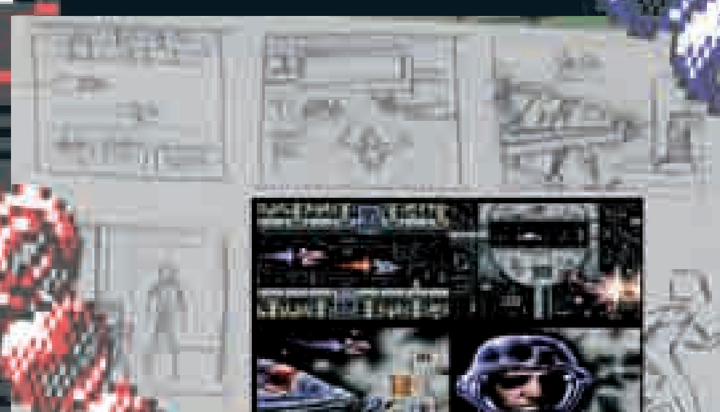
NOW & THEN

Do the team still play *Armalyte* nearly 20 years later? "I have played it recently on the PSP using the VICE emulator, my son liked it too," admits Kemp." I couldn't finish it now though." Kemp is no longer in the games industry and is currently working as a prison officer. Phillips is head of EyeToy Technology at Sony Europe, where he is also working on several PS3 titles. "I play it once in a blue moon… If I had the time I'd really like to make a modern day version. The Game Boy Advance conversion didn't get finished as the money involved was pitiful, but I did convert all the code to C++ – so there's no reason it couldn't be finished on a better/newer platform at some point," concludes Phillips.

Robin Levy is now Art Lead/Animator for a company making software for interactive toys, which plug straight into the TV. "Is it really nearing the 20 year mark? I feel old! Dan and I have talked about a new version a lot and we'd dearly like to do it, but I doubt we'll get the time and/or the finances to get it going. I'd love to do a true update for the web or Xbox Live though, not just a graphic conversion, a proper update to reflect the 20-odd-years of innovation in the shoot-'em-up genre and we have some rather novel ideas for multiplayer." Sounds like a plan to us.



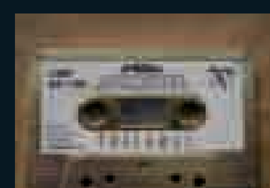
» The team may have not been huge fans of R-Type but many aspects of the games were similar to each other.



» Early sketches and how it eventually looked in the final game.

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE

Gary (aka Punisher) was a member of the demo group Genesis Project, and worked in a computer shop at the time. "I got friendly with a girl who worked for CentreSoft, we used to flirt a lot on the phone but we never met. She arranged for me to be sent the golden cassette. As far as I know I own the only copy, as the others were returned to Thalamus. The prize was a plasma globe, as I'm a gadget freak I had what they were offering anyway! I knew the tape would be a great collector's item for the future." Gary confirms there is no difference with the version on the gold cassette. "Anyone who had a C64 and didn't play this game is missing out. I have joked a few times about selling it with my friends, and they begged me not to."



CRYSTAL CASTLES

BEDAZZLED BY THE INTRICACIES OF CRYSTAL CASTLES? LET MARK ALPIGER, A DEVOTED FAN, SHOW YOU HOW TO TAKE IT ALL IN YOUR STRIDE.

Atari's *Crystal Castles* had no obvious antecedents and indeed there's been nothing really like it since. Released in 1983, the Escher style 3D graphics, the array of odd characters and the precise trackball controller made it a unique challenge. The game also boasted many new ideas now commonplace in gaming. The initials of the programmer and his friends, along with those grabbed from the high score table, were integrated into the isometric castle structure. Secret warps allowed expert players to skip through the early levels and it was the first arcade title to have a distinct ending, rewarding those who defeated Berthilda with a rating on their performance and a hypnotic closing screen.

RG plans to interview Franz X Lanzinger, the genius behind this singular title, in a future issue. In the meantime, the best source of information on the game is conveniently found at Mark's own site. Alongside an incredibly detailed and passionate dissection of *Crystal Castles*, you'll find a wealth of gaming related material and a lively forum. Join in at www.classicarcadegaming.com.



» Mark regained *The Glob* record at last year's CAGDC tournament, which he co-organises. See his site for details of the 2007 contest.

THE EXPERT

"I like short games. Quick and fast," enthuses Kentuckian Mark Alpiger. "You can complete *Crystal Castles* in five minutes. You can get a World Record in less than 20. *Marble Madness*, my second favourite game of all time, takes only two minutes. I like a short, sweet bite. Have I got a short attention span? You might think that from how fast I talk."

Mark may gabble as swiftly as he plays, but his devotion to *Crystal Castles* means he's clocked up over 6000 games. The distinctive visuals caught his eye when the title was previewed on US TV show *Starcade* in 1983. He played in his local arcade for years, before acquiring his own machine in 1986 and entered the Guinness Book of Records for his high scoring feats.

"I took photos of all the 37 levels in the game and counted every gem on every screen. You might say that was anally retentive, but I was trying to guesstimate the theoretical maximum – the perfect game."

Mark has a habit of chronicling gaming details. He has amassed an unparalleled collection of posters, T-shirts and tournament memorabilia from the Eighties, often turning up on the Monday after a big contest to rescue the paraphernalia before it was binned, and much of this salvaged treasure is viewable on his website. This commitment to sharing his gaming love went so far as to induct another keen *Crystal Castles*' player, Frank Seay, into the ways of the Bear, only for his protégée to eventually top his best of 898,815 with the current high of 910,722. The rivalry was wholly friendly, Mark assures us.

"We'd played the game together so much, we'd make up challenges and bet a lot to keep it interesting. Like who could eat the most gem eaters or ride the least elevators. Or we'd talk through the other's game, trying to put them off, by telling them to MOVE at a critical juncture that needed real concentration. Because of that, nothing phases me in the arcade anymore."

Yet Mark can still phase us somewhat with his theatrical game playing. He's not averse to slipping off his shoes and putting in a virtuoso performance with his feet or donning a single weight lifter's glove to prevent any unwelcome flesh wounds caused by excessive trackball spinning. We wonder if this exuberance ever attracted any female attention at his local Chuck-E-Cheese?

"Not really and even if it had, my looks would have repelled them. In High School, I was thin, had braces, acne, wore glasses and was a 98 pound weakling. Geek city!"

All obstacles Mark has clearly overcome, but can he face up to his biggest challenge and regain that *Crystal Castles* record? "The problem is time. It might take 4000 games to beat it, but it's something I plan on pursuing. Maybe in retirement!"

THE KNOWLEDGE

There are basically two different types of enemies in the game: those that track Bentley Bear, and those that do not.

Of the enemies that track Bentley, the most difficult is probably the tree, which tries to move towards Bentley in a straight line. The crystal balls are a bit more flexible, and can work their way around obstacles using their momentum. Finally, the bees move in the same way as the tree, but only land on the maze periodically, mainly to protect the honey.

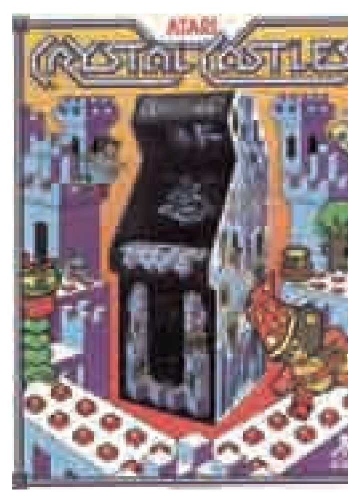
Although the rest of Bentley's foes in the game don't go after him directly, they still pose problems, mainly by getting in the way. One of the most troublesome of this type of opponent are the gem eaters, who not only block the way, but can take away gems, and therefore points, by eating gems they happen upon. One effective way to rid yourself of the gem eaters is to simply touch them while they are eating a gem. This will eliminate the gem eater from that board, and also award you 500 points. This is easy to do in the lower levels, but hard on level 7 and above, as the enemies move much more quickly.

To complete a maze, all the gems must be picked up. There is a bonus if Bentley can collect the last gem on a maze, so be sure none of the enemies gets it first. The main way to earn points is to collect the gems

HIGH SCORE NEWS

Roy 'Mr Awesome' Shildt was perturbed to discover his former *Missile Command* WR had been removed from the TG scoreboard. He greeted the news in stoic fashion by informing Walter Day he was 'gonna get snuffed', challenged 'that chump Tony Temple' to fly over to LA for a showdown and screamed maniacally on allgames.com radio. See their show archive for some of his entertaining and slightly scary ranting at http://tinyurl.com/3d93cw.

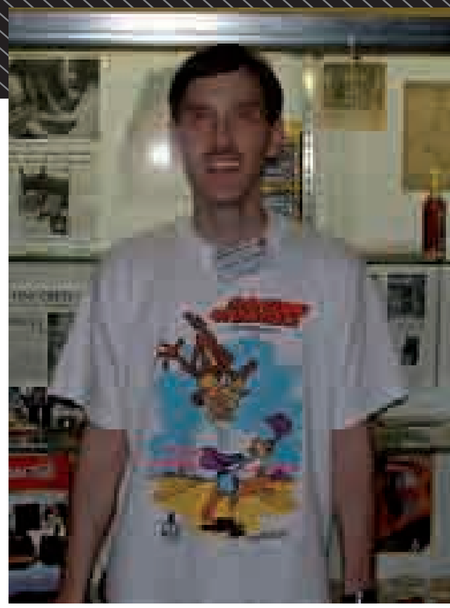
If you've ever felt intimidated by the mighty scores of Americans reported in this column, then meet your new special friend, Luke Wells. He's recently launched a site to record the top scores by British gamers on classic arcade titles. "The aim is to increase friendly competition and give gamers something to aim for," he tells us, "but we do intend to record "official" UK records and hope to have representation at all major competitions and events." Show your support and get your initials on the high score table at www.arcadeuk.com/highscores.



» Nice hat Bentley. Very you.



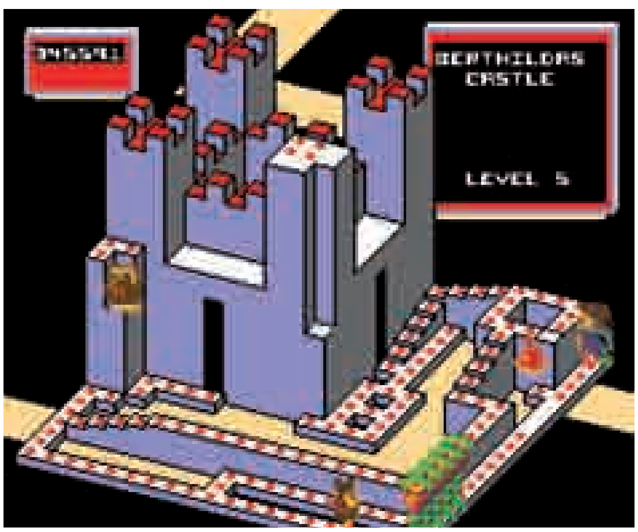
» All together now, 'You put your right foot in…'



» Mark enters the Size Zero debate in this original Road Runner T-shirt.



» The ornately decorated arcade cabinet, with that all-important illuminated trackball.





» Each level in *Crystal Castles* was given a title, some hinting at concealed intricacies…

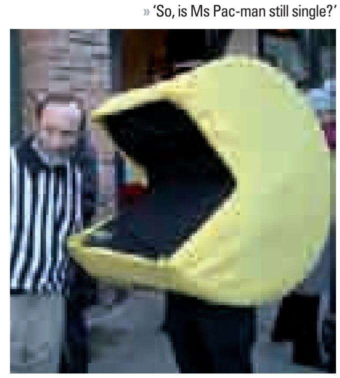
themselves, which start out at one point each, and increase up to 99 points each. It is important to move quickly in the game, and collect the most gems possible, as this is the key to high scores.

On most mazes, a hat and a honey pot appear. The hat will make Bentley invulnerable for a few seconds. In levels below 4, it stays in the same place, but after that it moves about randomly. On level 9, the hat lands on the maze and on the sixth bounce turns into a ball, so it is important to pick it up quickly. Note that Berthilda the witch, who appears on every fourth maze, can be eliminated if Bentley touches her while wearing the hat. Also, picking up the honey can delay the bees landing, but when they return, they will land at the spot where the honey was. A good tip for beginners is to collect the honey at the start of the maze, to avoid fighting the bees later on. In addition to playing the game starting at the beginning and going through the 10 levels one at a time, there are warps that exist to allow you to skip certain levels. This is how you should begin your game, if you are more of an advanced player. The three warp spots (activated with the jump button) are: the back left corner of level 1 maze 1 (1/1); the bottom of the hidden staircase on 3/1 (though you must be wearing the magic hat); and the back left corner of 5/3.

Once you have completed the first maze on any level through level 8, all subsequent games may begin starting at the last level by using a warp tunnel, which will appear on the first screen. Starting at level 8 (the highest allowed) affords the highest possible time bonus (given upon completion of the last maze – 10/1) in the game, which is important for a good score.

For more detailed tips, particularly on the latter part of the game, see Mark's website.

SCREEN PLAY



» 'So, is Ms Pac-man still single?'

High Scoring seems to be flavour of the month amongst Hollywood types. Two videogame-inspired films recently premiered at the Sundance and Slamdance Festivals: *The King Of Kong* tells of the rivalry between Donkey Kong maestros Billy Mitchell and Steve Wiebe, whilst *Chasing Ghosts* catches up with the gaming superstars that posed for the famous Life magazine photograph, taken in 1982 outside the original Twin Galaxies arcade. The latter movie features numerous alumni of this column, including Steve Sanders, Todd Rogers and Mark Robichek. Walter Day, TG founder and chief referee, even turned up at the opening night and is pictured here in conversation with another eminent attendee. We'll keep you posted if the films make it across the pond.

THE MAKING OF…

TURBO ESPRIT

Before Grand Theft Auto III there was Driver, and before that there was Turbo Esprit, the 8-bit classic that skidded onto the Sinclair Spectrum more than 20 years ago. Martyn Carroll talks to Durell's Robert White and Mike Richardson about the game that has spawned many a monster hit.

IN THE KNOW



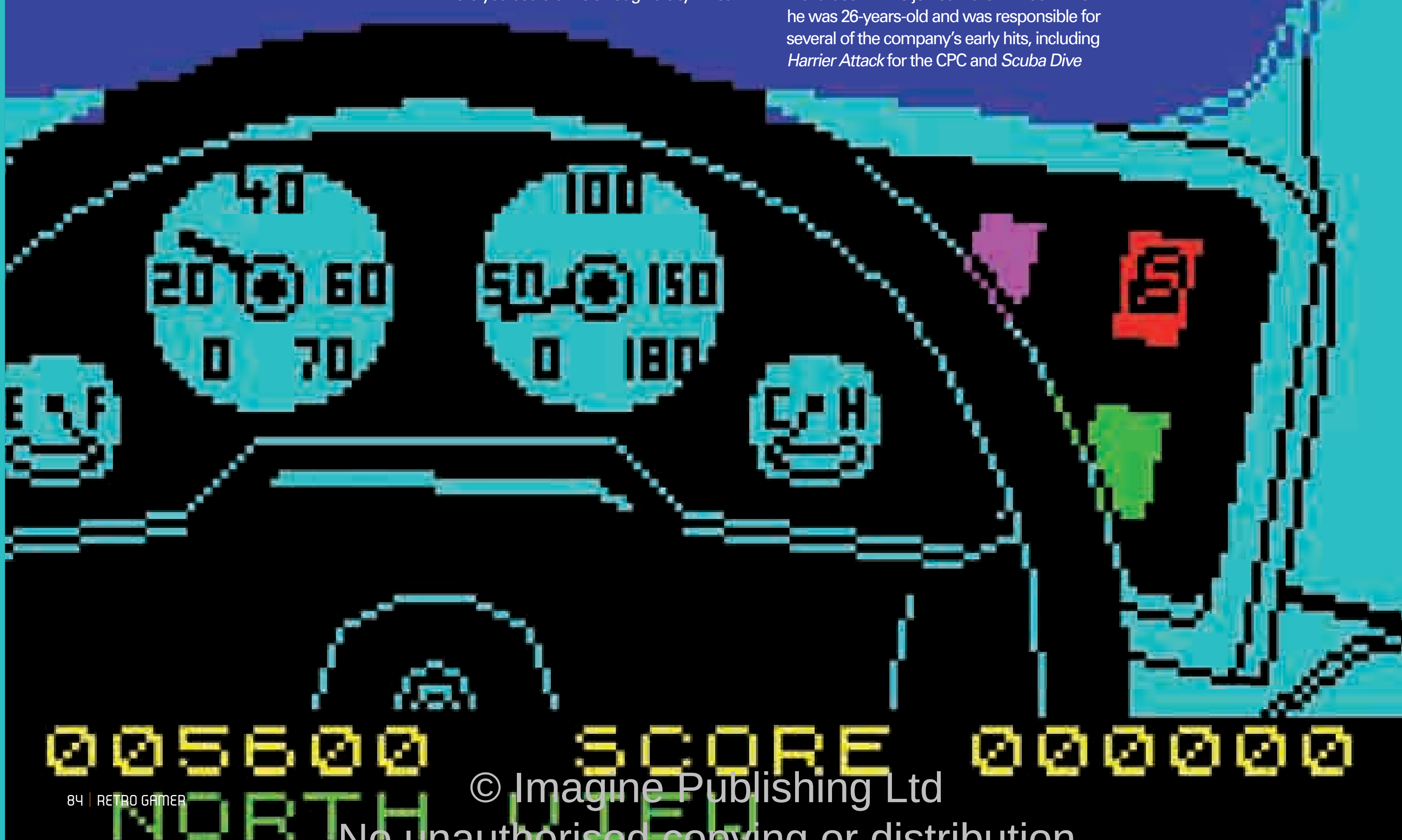
» **PUBLISHER:** DURELL SOFTWARE
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **GENRE:** DRIVING/STRATEGY
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1

T*urbo Esprit* is not a typical driving game. There's no clock, track or chequered flag. If that sounds plain wrong then maybe you were expecting to read about *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge*, Gremlin's similar-sounding Amiga racer that was ported to the Spectrum and other 8-bits. The games may share a Lotus license but they couldn't be more different. Unlike the Gremlin game, *Turbo Esprit* was not born from the almost impossible desire to replicate seat-of-your-pants racing on the Spectrum. If anything, Durell founder Robert White was aiming even higher.

"Fundamentally I wanted to create a game where you could drive through a city in real time," he says, before revealing that the initial inspiration for the game was somewhat, erm, sterile. "Prior to starting Durell I worked for the Oxford Regional Health Authority where we did hospital design. We used an integrated model in which you inputted design data and it would generate 3D maps of hospital wards. The idea was that you mapped the data once and then you could visualise it in different ways, and this was where the basic idea for *Turbo Esprit* came from."

TAKING THE WHEEL

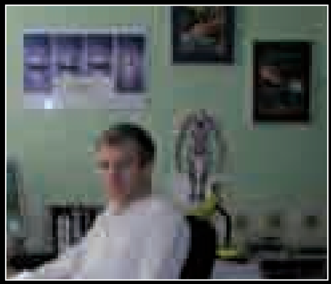
With the concept in place, Robert handed control to in-house programmer Mike Richardson. Mike joined Durell in 1984 when he was 26-years-old and was responsible for several of the company's early hits, including *Harrier Attack* for the CPC and *Scuba Dive*







» Mike (left) looks on as Robert demos software on his trusty Oric-1 that he bought when he first founded Durell.



» Mike relaxing at home, contemplating the final few weeks of work on *Harrier Attack II*.

for the Spectrum. "I had a huge amount of confidence in Mike," reveals Robert. "He was such a good programmer that I could outline an idea to him and he would take it from there. He added all the fantastic little bits and pieces like people walking down the street, pedestrian crossings, traffic lights and things like that. As with everything he did it turned out brilliantly."

> "FUNDAMENTALLY I WANTED TO CREATE A GAME WHERE YOU COULD DRIVE THROUGH A CITY IN REAL TIME" ROBERT WHITE

Robert is full of praise for Mike's obvious talent but the man himself is surprisingly self-effacing. His softly spoken recollections of *Turbo Esprit*'s development suggest an almost workmanlike approach in which the game slowly but surely came together. "*Turbo Esprit* was the game I spent the longest on," he says. "It took about ten months in total to complete, but I was never under any pressure to rush to finish the game. I felt that Robert trusted me to do a good job in reasonable time and I guess there wasn't a huge marketing department gearing up for a particular date like there often is these days."

Mike spent the first few months developing the 3D system that would give Speccy owners the impression of being behind the wheel of a turbo-charged sports car. He'd already created one 3D-style game – the helicopter sim *Combat Lynx* – but having to build a large inhabited city, with roads running north, south, east and west, was an entirely different proposition. "It was a bit of a feat," he says. "All of the 3D was done from a lookup table, so there was no calculation of points in 3D at all. Any point on a building always occurred at a certain line in the lookup table rather than by calculation. Obviously if you tried to calculate 3D on a Spectrum you'd be there all day."

Mike succeeded in getting the game running at a decent pace, but one particularly neat feature had to be sacrificed for speed's sake. "The display original had a rear-view mirror which I had to scrap. It wasn't difficult to do but it meant rendering the scene twice which would have slowed everything down too much." The keen-eyed amongst you may like to note that the rear-view mirror can be seen in the screenshots used on the game's original packaging and advertising.

JUST SAY NO

With the technical groundwork completed Mike began to piece the gameplay together. The first consideration was the back-story and this was shaped by an all-powerful influence – the boss's wife. "She was against violence in games so we had to be careful with blood and stuff," he smiles. "There



» The Commodore 64 version is embarrassingly awful, with the Lotus Esprit looking (and handling) more like a Fiat 127.



» Squint at the screenshots on this ad and you'll see the rear-view mirror that had to be scrapped during development.

BOX OF TRICKS

To help speed up the development process, Mike shunned the Spectrum's feeble keyboard and tape-save system in favour of a more practical alternative. "I bought an Epson CP/M machine which had two 5.25in floppy drives and 256Kb of RAM – 64Kb was used for the operating system and the rest formed a handy RAM drive. I upgraded the memory to 1Mb by plugging in different RAM chips, modified the motherboard and slightly re-programming the OS. Then I soldered together a cable to connect the Epson printer port to an add-on parallel interface on the Spectrum. I could work on the Epson, using a proper keyboard and the RAM drive for compilation, then download the compiled code to the Spectrum in seconds. Inside the case it all looked a bit Heath Robinson but it worked amazingly well."



THE MAKING OF...

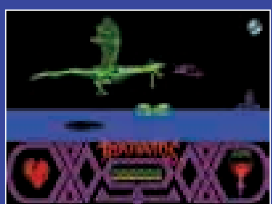
TURBO ESPRIT

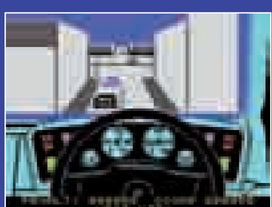
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

HARRIER ATTACK
SYSTEMS: ORIC-1, SPECTRUM, CPC, C64
YEAR: 1983

SABOTEUR
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, CPC, C64, C16, PLUS4
YEAR: 1986

THANATOS
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, CPC, C64
YEAR: 1986

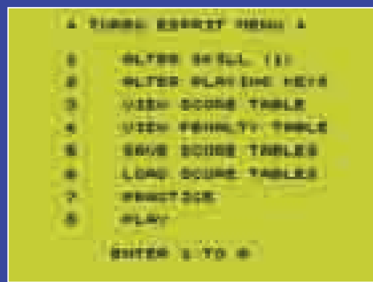




» You can stop the no-good drug dealers by either shooting their vehicle or ramming them into submission.



» The mission is complete when the armoured car submits, but the fight against drugs never ends. There are more cities to cleanse, more suppliers to stop…



» The Spectrum version features a sparse menu system. "I'm not interested in fancy front-ends," says Mike.

was some discussion in the office as to what the game could be about and we arrived at drug dealing and trying to put a lid on it, as it where. You were a good guy, which went along with the non-violent thing. There was no blood – it wasn't ugly in that respect."

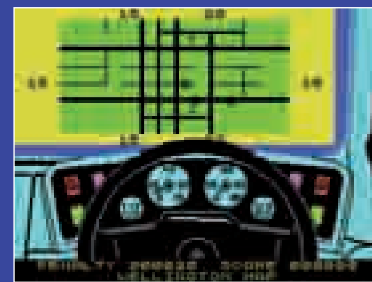
The 007 comparisons are obvious, as you play a secret agent driving a Lotus Esprit, complete with onboard machine guns, but there's much more to the game than speeding around one of the four cities shooting smugglers. Robert refers to each city as a chessboard and this is a fitting analogy as you must watch the map and plan your strategy while the players make their move. Mike provides a programmer's commentary: "The idea is to park up around the corner from where the drugs exchange will occur. The is usually near the city centre – you can find out the precise position by observing the behaviour of the four smugglers' cars as they will circle the drop-point waiting for the armoured drug car to arrive. If you're parked too close to the drop-point the exchange doesn't take place, so you must watch the map, wait for the exchange to happen, see which way the cars are heading for a second and then give chase."



» The Big 4 compilation marked the first appearance of *Turbo Esprit* on the C64. Celebrations were understandably muted.

To score maximum points you must stop each of the four smugglers from escaping with the drugs and then apprehend the armoured car before it too leaves the city. It's significant that the gameplay does not pause when you view the city map, as this allows the action to play out in real time. This is particularly effective when you're closing in on a target, as you must keep glancing at the map as you tear through the city. Taking your eyes off the road even for a split second could be deadly, with you running red lights, slamming into oncoming traffic or mowing down hapless pedestrians attempting to cross the road.

The game does not turn a blind eye to dangerous driving – there's a penalty meter that clocks each of your traffic offences. Cause enough mayhem and you're invited



» The map not only shows you the position of enemy cars but also highlights petrol stations and other features.

to enter your name in the hall of shame, and it goes without saying that this was an attractive proposition to many gamers; rounding up bad guys was fun but killing innocents was fantastic! Mike reveals that this was no accident: "I planned it because that's the sort of stuff I personally liked to do best. To actually attempt the mission takes effort and brain power, and some people don't like doing that, so I added a few extra things to see and do." We assume that the boss's wife never found out about this gruesome little sideshow.

Surprisingly, one of the last things to be added was the Lotus branding. Originally you were driving a generic set of wheels, but late on in the development one of Durell's advertisers had the bright idea of approaching Lotus. "The Lotus link came right at the end," explains Robert. "We had an advertising agency based in Norwich, not far from the Lotus factory. We asked for permission to use its name and Lotus agreed, as it was free advertising for its





» With so many bad drivers around those little men up ladders never stood a chance.

flagship model. It wasn't a money deal or anything like that – things were a lot more innocent back then."

Rather than slap the Lotus brand on and be done with it, Mike spent time updating the game graphics to fit. "We went and visited Lotus," he recalls. "It wasn't of any technical use but we did come back with some pictures of Lotus cars. The car on the outside was certainly modelled on an Esprit, or as much as I could do with a few pixels. The dashboard in the game was hardly a perfect replica," he laughs, as modest as ever. Closer inspection reveals that the in-game dashboard is spookily similar to an Eighties model Esprit, with all the gauges in the right places and the speedometer registering the correct top speed of the real car. The devil's in the detail, as they say.

PAVING THE WAY

Thanks to its expansive city setting, genre-mashing gameplay and open structure, *Turbo Esprit* is widely acknowledged as a forerunner to games like *Driver* and *Grand Theft Auto*. It's ironic then that its far-reaching influence is completely lost on Mike who is no longer an avid gamer. "I haven't played a game properly since *Tomb Raider* on the PSone about 10 years ago," he admits to us. "I just don't find myself with any spare time these days."

> "TO ACTUALLY ATTEMPT THE MISSION TAKES EFFORT AND BRAIN POWER, AND SOME PEOPLE DON'T LIKE DOING THAT, SO I ADDED A FEW EXTRA THINGS TO SEE AND DO" MIKE RICHARDSON

Robert, on the other hand, is more aware of the game's impact, even though Durell pulled out of the games market 20 years ago (the company now develops database software). He has no regrets about not capitalising on *Turbo Esprit* however, merely pointing out that the industry has always gorged on itself to survive. "With *Turbo Esprit* I think we were the first to come up with the idea of mapping a city and then driving through it. But then our first game, *Harrier Attack*, was just a side-on shooter like *Scramble*. We sold around 250,000 copies of *Harrier Attack* and it generated most of the development money for the next three years, so games like *Turbo Esprit* were all thanks to *Harrier Attack*, which was basically a rip-off of someone else's idea. I guess that's the way it works."

Turbo Esprit didn't come close to matching the success of *Harrier Attack* – Robert estimates that it sold a respectable 50,000 copies, although the total would be higher if you included the game's inclusion on compilations and its later re-release on Elite Software's budget label. Debuting in Spring 1986, the original Spectrum release was the best selling version, thanks to excellent reviews from gaming mags (it earned a Your Sinclair Megagame, a Sinclair User Classic and was just two per cent shy of a coveted Crash Smash). A passable Amstrad CPC port followed in the Summer, while the C64 version spluttered onto the scene at Christmas as part of the *Durell Big 4* compilation alongside *Saboteur*, *Combat Lynx* and *Critical Mass*. It's hardly surprisingly that the C64 port was not granted a standalone release as it's a real car crash of a game.

We wrapped things up by asking Mike if the Spectrum hardware simply lent itself better to 3D-style games like *Turbo Esprit*, and for the first time in our company he sings his own praises. "I'd like to think it was better on the Spectrum because of my expertise, if that's okay with you."

That's perfectly okay with us Mike.

TURBO ESPRIT 2?

There was no talk of a *Turbo Esprit* sequel in the Eighties – Mike preferred to work on original projects like *Thanatos* and *Sigma Seven* – but there's a chance we may yet see some kind of follow-up. For the past two years Mike has been developing a PC sequel to *Harrier Attack*, working under the Durell Games banner. A quick visit to the website (www.durellgames.com) reveals lots of information about the upcoming *Harrier Attack II*, and there's a poll where visitors can vote for which old Durell game Mike should update next. At present *Turbo Esprit* is easily topping the poll with almost twice as many votes as the game in second place, *Scuba Dive*, so if the voting continues in this way a sequel could very well be on the cards. Turbo Elise anyone?



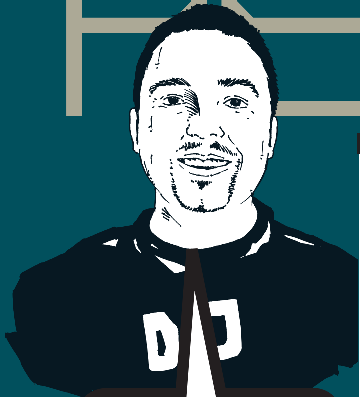


» Seven cars on screen at once! That's more that you see in the *Grand Theft Auto* games.



» Typical. The exchange has been made and you're stuck waiting for some old fool to cross the road!

RETRORATED



With the release of the Virtual Console, Nintendo has revealed that it's more than happy to take Microsoft on at its own game. While recent releases have been somewhat thin on the ground, there's a host of excellent games just over the horizon and Microsoft is promising a lot more. In the meantime why not consider downloading some of the following.

88 **ALIEN HOMINID HD**
Something to fill the space left by the lack of *Metal Slug*

88 **JETPAC REFUELLED**
One of Xbox Live Arcade's finest games

88 **DOUBLE DRAGON**
Xplosiv stuff with an old school beat-'em-up

88 **DOOM**
Handicapped by a weak online mode *Doom* is still worth a look

88 **ASSAULT HEROES**
Proving to be a polished retro blaster

89 **DIG DUG**
Darran's confronts his demons to give *Dig Dug* a fair review

89 **MS. PAC-MAN**
Making up for past disappointments

89 **PAPERBOY**
Relive your first job, with a fun little title

89 **HEAVY WEAPON**
Another title featuring *Robotron*-styled controls

89 **WORMS**
The warring annelids are back in fine form

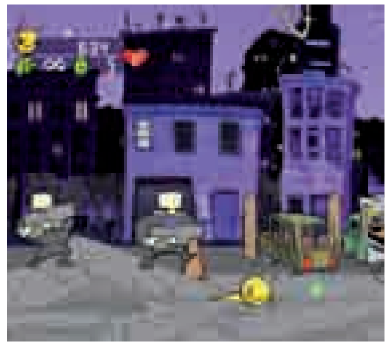
ALIEN HOMINID HD

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** THE BEHEMOTH
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800

While we all wait for SNK to release *Metal Slug*, this and Konami's *Contra* are by far your best alternatives.

Bursting with a retina-scorching colour palette and a collection of oddball monstrosities, The Behemoth's *Alien Hominid* is one of the most refreshing blasters around and a welcome addition to Live's slowly building catalogue. Granted, it's insanely hard in places (spotting bullets causes plenty of eye straining) so much so that it's liable to put some off, but if you're looking for an old-school blaster and already own *Contra*, then you really have no other choice. Our only real niggle with *Hominid HD* is that the levels are identical to the original Xbox, PS2 and GameCube versions.

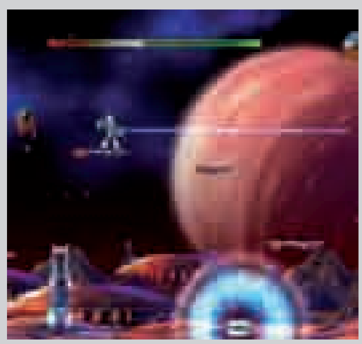


JETPAC REFUELLED

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** RARE
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800

Wow. We've been playing *Jetpac Refuelled* for the best part of a week now and we can safely say it's one of the best games on Xbox Live Arcade. Not only has Rare ported the original Spectrum version in all its colour clash glory, it's delivered a blistering remake that sticks to the ethics of the original while introducing a whole host of new elements like a larger playing field and some snazzy weapons. Insanely addictive and with a fantastic co-op mode *Jetpac Refuelled* is the perfect example of how it's possible for a talented developer to breath new life into a title that's now a quarter of a century old. Quite simply, if you don't make this your next download then Live Arcade is wasted on you and you deserve to by smacked around the face with a frozen Salmon.



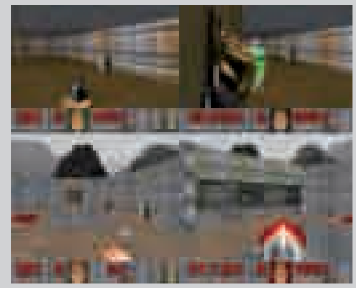
DOUBLE DRAGON

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** XPLOSIV
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 400

Let's just get one thing straight about *Double Dragon*: the new hi-res look that all the characters have been given scares us greatly. Fortunately, the original game has also been included in all its pixelated glory, and while the new graphical style takes a while to get used to, the rip-roaring gameplay is still as good as ever. Yes, it's a relatively easy fighter (easier still if you just use the head butt or elbow moves) but it's also amazing fun, especially when you're joined by a second player. It will be interesting to see what other titles Xplosiv will be bringing to Live Arcade, but if they match the quality of *Double Dragon* we'll be more than happy.



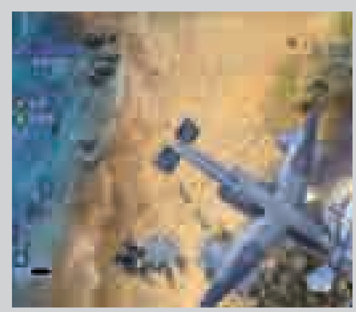


DOOM

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** ID SOFTWARE
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800

It's a shame, but one of the most exciting aspects of this Xbox Live Arcade version of *Doom* – the ability to play online – proves to be one of its biggest weaknesses. There's no denying that *Doom* remains a masterwork of impressive level design and is still an incredibly tense experience, but it's somewhat disappointing that playing online proves to be such a painful chore. Of course, when you get a game that's relatively lag-free you're laughing and can witness *Doom* in all its bloody glory, but for all intents and purposes it's probably best to stick with the classic offline mode instead. Now where's *Doom II*?



ASSAULT HEROES

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** WANAKO STUDIOS
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800

Never mind the fact that it boasts gorgeous visuals, impressive phsyics and amazing pyrotechnics, *Assault Heroes* is pure retro through and through. Taking a similar approach to Eugene Jarvis' Total Carnage, Assault Heroes is an overhead scrolling shooter that cranks the mayhem up to 11 in order to give your thumbs a real workout. While the tried and tested Robotron-styled control method is looking a little tired, there's no denying that Assault Heroes is an incredibly polished blaster. Play co-op for the ultimate adrenalin rush.

DIG DUG

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 400

I've never been a fan of *Dig-Dug*. I've always seen it as a poor substitute for Universal's amazing *Mr Do!* and it always seems to get high praise, while the Universal classic is often unjustly ignored by the masses. Recently though, this opinion has changed. Don't get me wrong, I'll still choose that lovable clown over Taizo Hori any day of the week, but I'm enjoying this update a great deal. Maybe it's the easy achievements, or it could be that the endlessly annoying tune has finally broken me; but somehow, I'm actually enjoying this



Namco re-release, even if it has appeared on practically every compilation Namco has ever released. I'd kill for Mr Do! though.

MS PAC-MAN

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 400

Now this is more like it. After the disappointing *Pac-Man*, Namco appears to have gotten everything right with its superior sequel.

The biggest issue of Xbox Live Arcade *Pac-Man* was that the little yellow muncher appeared to have a mind of his own and refused to follow the most basic of commands. This has now been fixed, and while the 360's D-pad is no substitute for the DOA arcade stick that's currently available it still makes a huge difference to how the game plays.

Featuring more mazes, intelligent, faster ghosts and some charming cutscenes, *Ms Pac-Man* is a superb download that more



than makes up for the abomination that was Pac-Man. Sure we'd love to see some newer titles from Namco, but at least we're actually getting some decent games now.

PAPERBOY

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** DIGITAL ECLIPSE
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 400

All right, so your 360 can't replicate the steering wheel that came with the original arcade version but that's the only downside we can see to this stunning conversion from Digital Eclipse.

The Stephen Hawkings sounding Paperboy, the garishly painted houses, the annoying cats that leapt out at you, causing you to crash; everything's here and it's all been beautifully restored. Driving around a neighbourhood and delivering newspapers has never been so much fun and while the isometric viewpoint occasionally unfairly robs you off a precious life



this remains classic arcade fun. Just don't touch it online, as the lag is unbearable.



HEAVY WEAPON

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** POPCAP GAMES
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800

There appears to be a written rule in the Xbox Live Arcade release schedule that states that one game per month must include a title that features *Robotron*-styled controls.

While *Heavy Weapons* follows this template to the letter – the left analogue steers your tank, while the right directs its fire – its execution couldn't be more different. Your cute looking tank constantly trundles along the bottom of the screen, on its way to the obligatory end of level boss, while squadrons of enemy planes fly ahead, attempting to stop you in your tracks.

It's a very simple concept that's bolstered by a well-pitched difficulty curve, gorgeous visuals and an insane multiplayer mode. Well worth splashing 800 points on if you're lucky enough to have 800 points to spare of course.



WORMS

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** TEAM 17
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800

It seems to have been in developer limbo for an eternity now, but Worms has finally crawled its way onto Xbox Live Arcade and it's everything we could have hoped for. Featuring a similar graphical style to the recent PSP game (no bad thing in itself) and a host of brilliant weapons (including my personal favourite, the exploding sheep)

Worms is otherwise exactly as you remember and looks set to become one of Live Arcade's most played games, thanks to its excellent online mode and sheer charm. Blowing up a regiment of worms with a well-placed air strike is never going to get old, while an array of exceedingly tougher challenges ensures that they'll be plenty to sink your teeth into should you ever get tired of killing annelids online. Our only concern is that it's probably going to get milked to death via extra downloads.

» KONAMI'S CLASSIC FINALLY GETS RESURRECTED

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

THE BEST 800 POINTS YOU'LL EVER SPEND. SERIOUSLY.



- » **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **PRICE:** 800 POINTS (ROUGHLY £6)
- » **RELEASED:** APRIL
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** DIGITAL ECLIPSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

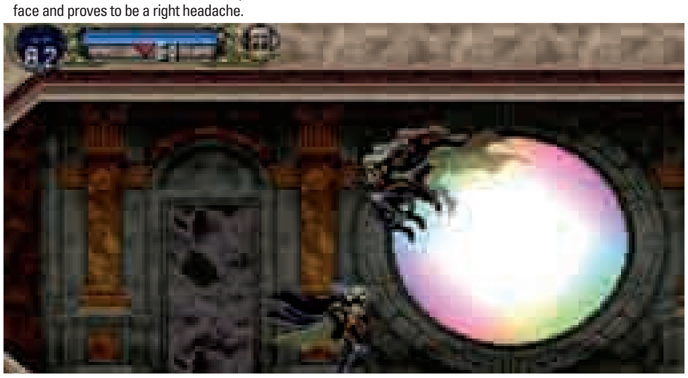


How on earth did *Symphony Of The Night* ever make it on to Xbox Live arcade?

Criminally ignored by the masses upon its initial release (at least in Europe) *Symphony* is a far cry from the hectic blasters that currently dominate Microsoft's download service and began life as a PlayStation game for crying out loud – not the likeliest of titles you'd expect to crop up on Microsoft's 360. Nevertheless, thanks to a collaboration between Konami, Microsoft and those ridiculously talented coders at Digital Eclipse, the greatest *Castlevania* ever, perhaps the best game within its genre is finally here and boy are we grateful for it.

Despite being ten-years-old, *Symphony* has lost none of its impact to thrill, excite and amaze and within moments of listening to the heartrending chorus that plays over its sombre opening we were happily back in its world. The return of *Symphony Of The Night* is the gaming equivalent of the second coming and our heart skips a little beat every time we are able to sit down in front of it.

» This evil twin is one of the first bosses you face and proves to be a right headache.



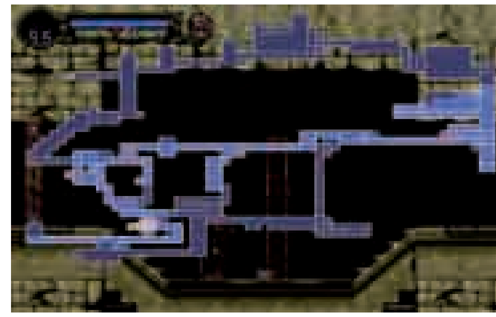
It's rare that you get second chances in life, but the opportunity to play through Iga's magnificent sprawling adventure, whether it's your first, third or hundredth time is not one that should ever be missed. Beautifully structured and with a heavy emphasis on exploring that gorgeously gothic castle, *Symphony* demands your attention from the moment Alucard enters Dracula's treacherous abode and, like a rabid pit-bull that's clamped on to your privates, refuses to let go.

Although Alucard begins his quest with a full complement of weapons and armoury, it's not long before a chance meeting with Death robs him of his precious equipment and forces him to run around (initially at least) with just his bare hands for protection. Luckily for Alucard, his father's minions happen to be an untidy lot and you'll soon start picking up a variety of weapons, armour and other items that have been carefully strewn throughout Dracula's gothic abode. Collecting and using these many items was a huge dynamic shift for the series back in 1997, and while it's now been somewhat diminished, this is mainly due to their overuse in the many handheld *Castlevania*s that followed, as opposed to any actual problems with

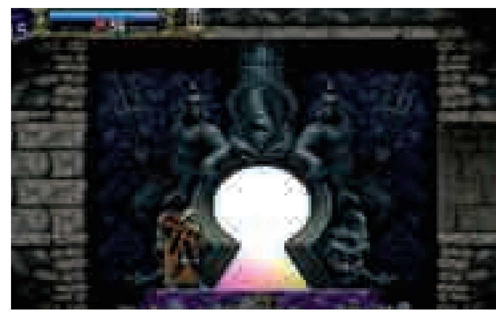


OPINION

It seems like an age since *Symphony* was first announced, and I still can't believe it's true. While Darran's correct that owners of later *Castlevania*s may wonder what all the fuss is about, *Symphony* remains a quality adventure. Deep, imaginative and involving, *Symphony* not only cements Digital Eclipse's reputation for superb conversions, but also makes you wonder what other PSone titles Microsoft may have up its sleeves. **Simon Phillips**



» Just a small section of *Symphony*'s huge map.



» Due to the sheer size of Dracula's castle, discovering Teleports becomes a necessary quest.



» Once you obtain this icon you'll be able to transform into a fast-running wolf. Very handy.



OPINION

Symphony of the Night is a very interesting release for Xbox Live Arcade for a number of reasons. It's the first PlayStation title to hit the system, it exceeds the original memory cap that was in place by quite a large margin and it's a lot more sedate compared to other titles on the service. Despite this (or maybe even because of it), it works brilliantly and is bound to be greatly revered by anyone who has never played it before. Now let's hope that *Rondo of Blood* gets a release… **Ashley Day**

Symphony. While the collecting of items may have lost a little of its charm, fighting the menagerie of weird and wonderful foes that inhabit *Symphony* remains as thrilling as ever. While *Symphony*'s numerous enemies are now more than familiar to anyone who's ever played a DS or GBA *Castlevania* (the sprites throughout are all virtually identical) their imaginative design and impressive animation still manage to impress. This attention to detail is particularly noticeable when Alucard is facing off against *Symphony*'s eclectic range of bosses. Many of the mayors you battle are absolutely huge, and will take an absolute pounding before they eventually die, and while you'll sometimes feel hopelessly outmatched (an issue common to the later games as well) you'll doggedly continue your crusade until you're finally standing in front of the dark lord himself.

Battling bosses, detecting secret passageways and new locations still manages to excite some ten years on since their first discovery, and while *Harmony Of Dissonance* on the GBA has made the discovery of the inverted castle less impressive – stop moaning, you've had the last ten years to discover it – retracing your route through the now eerie looking castle remains a highlight of the series and the genre in general.

And really, that's one of *Symphony Of The Night*'s biggest strengths. Even though the once ground-breaking formula has been effectively ground into the dust by Konami, *Symphony* remains incredibly refreshing and new and will hopefully find a brand new audience with those who have grown up with the numerous GBA and DS iterations.

Sure, the gameplay is far more sedate than other titles that are currently available on Live Arcade, and it doesn't have the same instant pick up and play, but that doesn't matter in the slightest. What we have here is one of the finest 2D games ever and Digital Eclipse (as always) has created a near perfect port (that looks all the better with its sharpened visuals). If we were to be churlish, we could complain that the text when characters are speaking isn't as sharp as the in-game visuals, but that would just be nitpicking. We'd still recommend the original PSone version at its current going price of £60. The fact that it's now available for a mere tenth of the price means that there's now no reason not to own this classic slice of 2D brilliance.

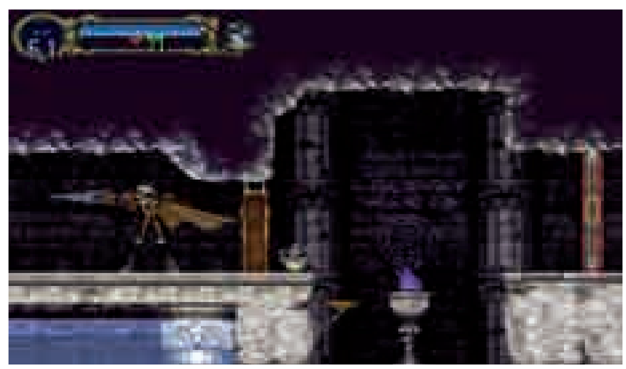
IN SUMMARY

An amazing slice of platforming action that sets a new precedent for Xbox Live Arcade and proves that Konami's classic masterpiece has lost none of its bite.

RATING **94%**



» It's not a boss but if these collection of deadly blades manages to touch you, you'll soon start losing precious energy. Run like the wind Alucard.



» Plenty of nice goodies, but how on earth are you supposed to reach them?



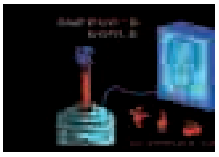
» He may be massive, but this giant skull is surprisingly easy to beat.





SWEEVO'S WORLD

WHAT THE FU…



- » **PUBLISHER:** GARGOYLE GAMES
- » **RELEASED:** IN-HOUSE
- » **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMSTRAD CPC
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1



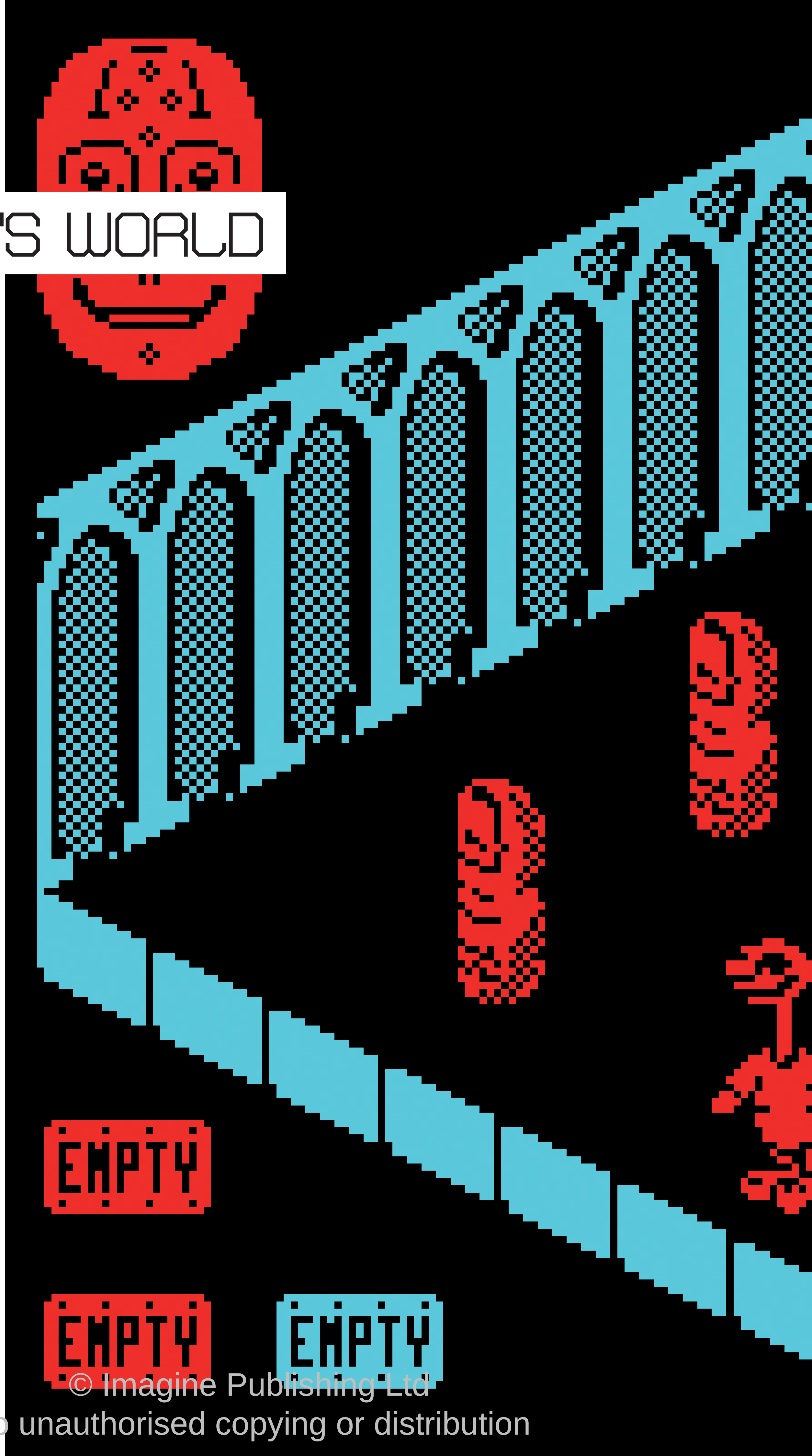
HISTORY

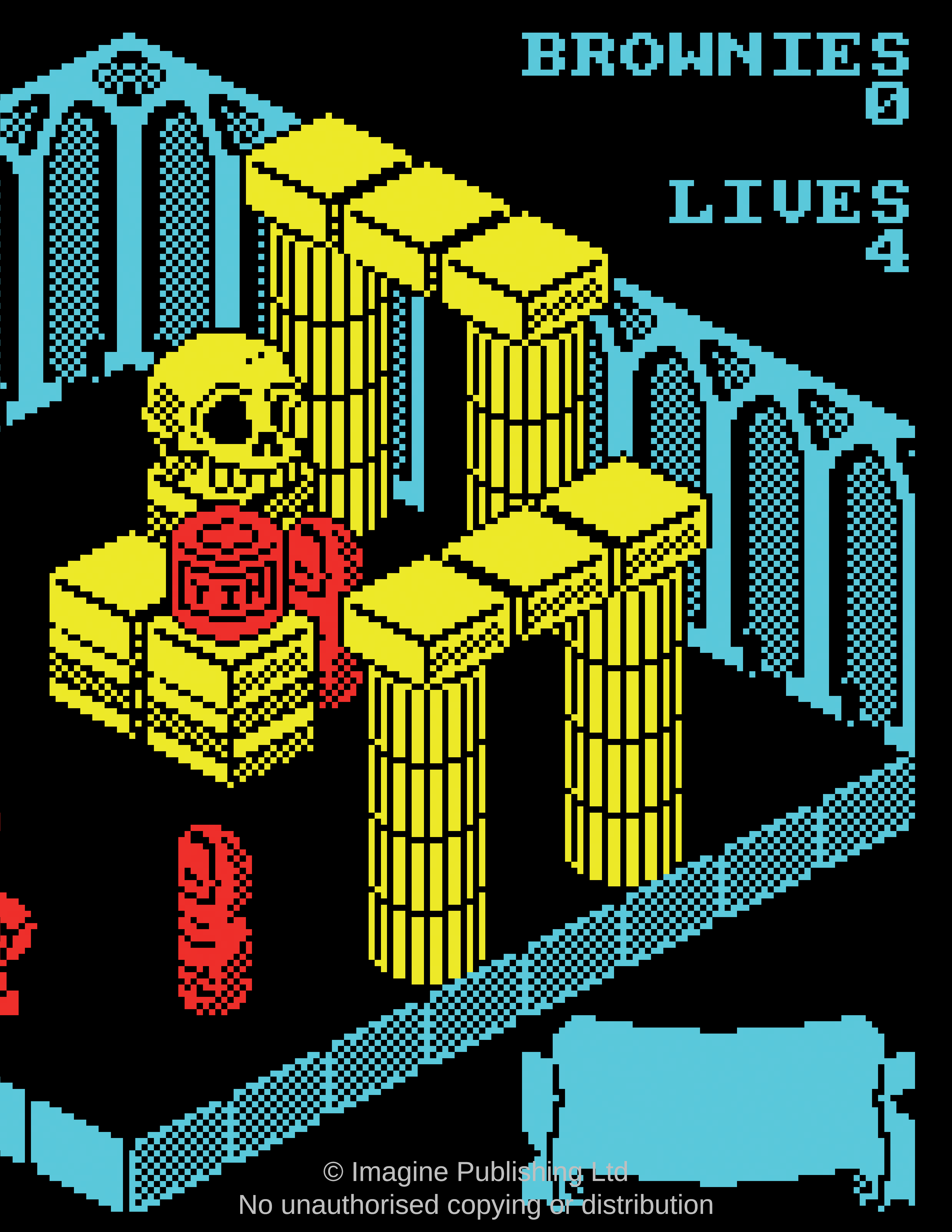
Pop quiz hotshot. It's 1986 – *Knight Lore* was released two years previously to huge critical acclaim and instantly spawned a host of copycat clones that were all too quick to jump onto the isometric adventure bandwagon. We want you to come up with a great new concept but it has to be special enough to stand up against Ultimate's adventures. What do you do? If you're Greg Follis and Roy Carter you come up with, *Sweevo's World*, quite possibly one of the nuttiest and zaniest titles ever committed to pixels.

Like Ultimate's *Alien 8*, *Sweevo's World* placed you in charge of a robot, but that's where the similarities end. Whereas the hero of *Alien 8* looks like a conventional droid that could have easily been found on a Jawa's Sandcrawler, Sweevo appears to be a bizarre cross between ET and Stan Laurel. Likewise, *Alien 8* took place in a serious futuristic setting, but *Sweevo's World* appeared to be set in the fertile imagination of Terry Gilliam, featuring brownies, fruit and the sort of bizarre oddities that would eventually pop up in Jon Ritman's *Head Over Heels*.

The plots were also a world apart, with your Self Willed Extreme Environment Vocational Organism (S.W.E.E.V.O. see) being assigned a planet to clean up before he could begin active duty. Sweevo's world is Knutz Folly. Now Knutz Folly was built by mad Baron Knutz who went crazy and populated his world with an array of dangerous genetic experiments that ranged from psychotic geese to giant fingers that would intermittently poke from beneath the ground. Add in the fact that Sweevo can be killed by the large pieces of fruit that can be found on most screens and *Sweevo's World* becomes a dangerously tricky adventure, albeit one that you'll play with a huge smile on your face.

Beautiful to look at, filled with plenty of head-scratching puzzles and offbeat humour, *Sweevo's World* is quite simply one of the funniest isometric adventures ever. Just make sure you don't get given the finger…




BROWNIES
0
LIVES
4
TIN

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



CONTACT US

Snail Mail
Retro Gamer
Imagine Publishing
Richmond House
33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth
Dorset
BH2 6EZ

Email
retrogamer@
imagine-publishing.co.uk

STAR LETTER!

NINTENDO PHONE HOME

Hi guys,
I've been reading your magazine for ages now and just can't get enough of Retro Games. I just thought I'd send you through an email to show you my latest modification. It's basically a Motorola A925 Smartphone with a NES controller shoved into it – I call it the Phonetendo. There are loads of freeware emulators currently available for it including: NES, SNES, Mega Drive, Master System, Game Gear, Game Boy, MAME, ScummVM and Atari ST. It's great to be able to carry around a whole heap of retro goodness right in my pocket and I just wanted to share my creation with the world.
Brad, via email

We've just got three questions for you Brad. How easy was it to make? How much does it cost? Can we have one? Seriously though, what a great little creation. Have a Retro Gamer T-Shirt and one of our brand new binders for your efforts.



I SPY WITH MY LITTLE EYE

Dear Retro Gamer,
Whilst brushing my teeth this morning, I saw *Asteroids* on my basin tap! Do you see it too, or am I just a little bit retro games obsessive? I've included a photo so you can witness this rare phenomenon.

Talking of *Asteroids*, it remains one of my all-time favourite Arcade games and over the years I've played many different versions of it but have always been disappointed by them. I thought that the intense excitement I felt as a kid playing and watching others play *Asteroids* at my local chippy would never re-surface, but I was wrong. I recently visited the Game On exhibition at the London Science Museum and 'that' feeling came to the fore! You really can't beat playing an arcade game that's housed in a proper cabinet with a proper arcade monitor, authentic artwork, sounds and controls.

I don't know if you have already covered this, but how about compiling a list of the Top Ten Eighties Arcade Games?
Best regards,
Henry P.

You're not going mad Henry; we can see Asteroids *on your tap as well. Oh, and glad to hear that you enjoyed your time at the Game On exhibition. We were going to agree with you about the lack of classic arcade machines there, but then we remembered we spent most of our day playing* Garou: Mark Of The Wolves. *Let's hope it returns next year. In the meantime keep watching those skies… we mean taps.*

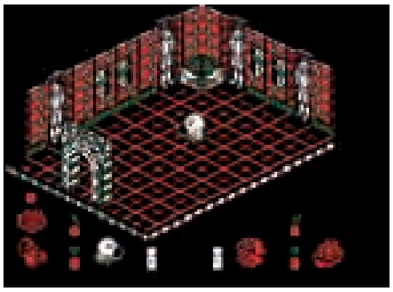


EVERY MONTH ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy Retro Gamer T-Shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a snazzy new Retro Gamer binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls; failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…

DÉJÅ VU?

Dear Retro Gamer,
I've been a reader from the very first edition of Retro Gamer and haven't missed a single issue. The reason for me writing is to say that in the past few issues I've noticed that some of the articles you've been covering have been featured before. Two that spring to mind are in this month's edition (34) The Making of *Head Over Heals* and The Making of *The Last Ninja*. I'm sure you've done in-depths on these two great games before. I hope that this doesn't mean that you are running out of things to write about, as it would be a great shame to see our Retro Gamer disappear from the shelves once again. Keep up the good work and a Commodore 16 in depth would be great to see as well.
Yours sincerely,
Mark.

Don't worry Mark – Retro Gamer is never going to run out of content. While we have plenty of old readers on board, Retro Gamer has also picked up a lot of new ones, many of which have not read previous issues of the magazine. Therefore we'll occasionally revisit past articles if we have interesting new angles for them. For example, Last Ninja *featured exclusive screens from the new game, while for* Dungeon Master *we interviewed the game's original creator. Not sure what you mean about* Head Over Heels *though. It must be in one of our missing issues.*



» **Top:** Mark's concerned that we're repeating too much old content. **Bottom:** Can you see Asteroids? Henry P can.





FROM THE FORUM

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE ASKING A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTING THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW: WHAT'S BEEN YOUR BIGGEST VIDEOGAME DISAPPOINTMENT?

ID: SirClive

Resident Evil. I am baffled how people can rave about it. A superb premise turned into an unplayable mess by a crazy control system that cripples you in any kind of crisis. I pray for a remake that fixes it.

ID: rossie46

Metal Gear Solid. Too much creeping and not enough blasting.

ID: necronom

Halo. It's a science fiction game set on a ringworld with marines, guns, and great graphics. I expected to love it. I put it on and couldn't believe they had ruined the whole thing by putting childish 'Nintendo monsters' in it, with silly sound effects. I still haven't recovered from the shock of how that could happen to such an otherwise realistic and serious game.

ID: felgekarp

Strider, the game's just a big pile of pap, yet a large amount of people constantly drool over it.

ID: Antiriad2097

Strider. It's a weedy bloke who does girly cartwheels, not the death-dealing action man it should be as the lead. *Strider*? Should have been called Mincer.

ID: Sabreman

Hehe, we should have all said *Strider* for a laugh. I wonder if Darran would have put it in the mag?

ID: MattC

Life. Nobody wins in the end.

ID: Dudley

Much like *Strider*.

ID: LeeT

The Last Ninja (C64). Beautiful graphics but appalling controls!

ID: Heavy Stylus

Morrowind. Great if you have a spare lifetime in which to play it, dull and very slow to get into if not. Can't believe that all the magazines raved about it.

WHERE'S THE CHEATS?

Dear Retro Gamer,
I just wanted to say that while your magazine is fantastic I think it could be vastly improved by adding cheats and tips each month. A section of retro cheats would be excellent and I've included some from *Prince Of Persia* on the Mega Drive to start you off.

Prince Of Persia Level Passwords:

2) QYZUSR
3) QYZHRM
4) QYZUPH
5) QYZHOC
6) QYZUMX
7) QYZHLS
8) QYZUJN
9) QYZHII
10) QYZUGD
11) XOPCHS
12) EUUTAA
13) QYZHCO

Yours Sincerely,
William Swords, Co. Tipperary.

Thanks for the cheats William, but it's not something that we feel would be relevant to the magazine. Also, why didn't you send us any codes for the Master System game? We play that version all the time.

CONTACT US **Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

RETRO SCENE

A TRIBUTE
KEITH CAMPBELL 1940 - 2006



» Keith at work in his home office. Let's hope he had a map…

Retro Gamer was deeply saddened to hear of the death of Keith Campbell, Adventure game columnist and author, last summer.

Keith was a fun guy who was instrumental in bringing Adventure gaming to the front and centre in his columns way back when, said Scott Adams, the granddaddy of micro Adventuring. He will certainly be missed by me.

It's a fitting tribute from the man that first introduced Keith to the joy of text.

Keith was something of a late starter, not acquiring a computer until 1980 and it was playing *Scott's Adventureland* on his TRS-80 that inspired him to set up adventure gaming evenings near his home in Brighton. Soon he was writing his own games based on fairytales and had a handful published by Molimerx software in the early Eighties. This led to an approach by the founders of C&VG, who asked Keith to put together an Adventure column for the inaugural issue. He continued to write for the magazine throughout the Eighties.

"It became a big part of family life," recalls Keith's son, Neil. "Dad would be writing two or three hours every night after he came home from work. We had a bedroom devoted to Adventure games, which at one point had a Vic-20, C64, Spectrum, Dragon, BBC, ST and four colour monitors in. Family and friends became like a team of playtesters – we'd write draft reviews for a bit of pocket money and he'd edit them into his style."

But Keith didn't just review games. The nature of Adventures meant people got stuck and in the days before the internet, he stewarded an Adventure Helpline page to provide hints to frustrated gamers and in so doing, built up a whole community of Adventure game enthusiasts.

"It wasn't about the money," explains Neil, "it was the enjoyment he got out of playing and writing and the people he met. Not just those he revered like Scott or the famous people like Jools Holland and Terry Jones. It was all the readers, some from as far as Poland, Portugal and Italy that he kept in touch with and made lasting friendships. He never expected a Polish guy to turn up on his doorstep and invite him to his wedding. That was what was special to him – the people."

Thus it was particularly upsetting when in 1990, after penning almost a hundred columns, his tenure at C&VG was abruptly ended with a change in editors. Keith never had the chance to say goodbye to his loyal following and it was not until 2004, when he got online and Retro Gamer contacted him for a Desert Island Disks piece, that he was welcomed back into the fold.

"Suddenly he had this burst of energy and enthusiasm, this spark, for something he'd done 20 years before," recalls Neil. "It was a real invigoration – he got all his old games out and to see all those happy memories come back to him was great. He got back in touch with people and became involved in that whole environment again. It gave him a massive lift."

Tragically, on 23 August 2006, Keith suffered an embolism, caused by complications from the removal of a tumour five years earlier. He collapsed at home and died suddenly. His widow, Ruth, wrote to Retro Gamer at Christmas and asked us to tell the many friends, who knew Keith through his writing, of the sad news.

"His funeral was exceptionally well attended," says Neil. "We had a thoroughly good party and anyone reading this who knew my dad will know he liked a good party. He used to tell me how he could never believe all the free booze on offer at game launches and how he would always work out where to position himself to make the most of it."

Let's all raise a glass to Keith Campbell – the friend of adventurers everywhere.



» Pre-release The Hulk code sent directly to Keith from the author himself, Scott Adams.



» Your correspondent meets his hero during the RG interview in 2004.

KEITH'S LAST COLUMN

AFTER BEING FEATURED IN RETRO GAMER 7, KEITH CONTRIBUTED SEVERAL GAME REVIEWS AND A WRITE-UP OF THE INTERACTIVE FICTION COMPETITION TO OUR MAGAZINE. BEFORE THE FORMER PUBLISHERS OF RETRO GAMER WENT INTO LIQUIDATION, KEITH WAS IN DISCUSSION WITH EDITOR MARTYN CARROLL ABOUT WRITING A REGULAR COLUMN AND HERE WE PRINT AN EXTRACT FROM HIS PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED SUBMISSIONS. WE THINK IT SERVES AS A TOUCHING EPITAPH FOR A MAN WHO WAS SUCH AN AMBASSADOR FOR ADVENTURE GAMING AND WHOSE WORK MADE A LASTING IMPRESSION ON HIS READERS.



» Keith proudly holding the first issue of C&VG from 1982 and his Book of Adventure.

When C&VG first started, its offices were in a little back street called Herbal Hill. To reach the comfortable chaos in which, miraculously, the magazine was produced, you had the choice of many stairs or the goods lift, a great big wooden platform with sliding metal doors, the floor usually half filled with bales of Biker magazine, that lurched alarmingly as it rattled up and down.

I visited the offices regularly and was taken aback on one occasion when Terry Pratt (the founder editor) handed me a pile of letters. "These are all for you," he said.

I gulped. People actually writing to me? What do I do now?

I settled down in a corner seat on the train back home that evening and read through them. They were asking for help with adventure games. After a couple of months, at Terry's suggestion, the adventure helpline was born. Every letter was answered on specially printed postcards, bearing the artwork heading the column.

But it wasn't just the pleas for help from readers that made interesting reading in the column. Some letters were amusing tales of frustrated adventurers. In November 1984, a Paul McRoy wrote accusing me of trying to enslave the world.

"Many people have tried. Hitler, Genghis Khan and Maggie Thatcher, but your master plan was the best of the lot! You're trying to reduce us all to gibbering idiots, tearing our hair out, casting spells, and breeding Rigelian Dia-Ice Hounds – AND IT'S WORKING!"

Paul went on to curse me, claiming it was my fault he'd "been lost in underground Zorks, been driven insane by ghostly piano players and been killed time and time again. I've lost my job, my wife has left me and taken the kids (how she found her way out I'll never know!) and the sad thing is I'm still hooked. Do you realise I haven't seen *Coronation Street* for three years? I didn't





» **Top:** Paul Coppins and Simon Marsh flank the big man on the very first PCW Adventure Helpline stand.
Bottom: Tell me what to do? **Examine hair**. You discover an adventure helpline. team hiding behind Scott Adams' barnet.



» A post PCW show adventurers bash organised by Keith (middle, back) and attended by amongst others, Dave Lebling from Infocom, Pete Austin from Level 9 and some strange ladies from St Bride's School…

RETRO SCENE



» Keith with Anita Sinclair of *Magnetic Scrolls.*



» Jools Holland narrowly beats Keith in the 'Shiniest Suit' category.

even know Ena Sharples was dead until I met her one day in Limbo!" There was the usual sting in the tail, of course. The letter ends: "Be a sweetie pie and tell me how to open the chest in *Pyramid Of Doom*."

It was letters like this that made writing the column so enjoyable, and contributed so much to readers' enjoyment.

"I have just read the interesting interview with you in the latest Retro Gamer," wrote Lee Theasby, "and just wanted to let you know that I really enjoyed reading your adventure columns in C&VG and Commodore User. Although I wasn't very good at playing Adventure games, I enjoyed reading your reviews along with the Adventure Helpline every month. I could never afford a lot of the full-price games in the Eighties (being a poor teenager!) so it's great to be able to download and play them now! Anyway I just wanted to let you know that your columns were (and still are) very enjoyable, even though I never found out the true identity of the Faringdon Fiend!"

Ah! Well I did, Lee, but that's a story for another day! Suffice to say it was a dramatic moment indeed when I found myself suddenly confronted by a figure wearing a brown paper sack over his head!

But the most heart-warming email I received was the following from Vinny Mainolfi from Milton Keynes: "I have a short story to tell you, which will hopefully make you smile and feel that your C&VG days were well worth it. I am a MASSIVE Commodore 64 fan and in the early Eighties, my cousin Carmello was also an avid C64 user, but he only seemed to play Adventure games. Now, Carmello couldn't read or write too well as he spent most of his childhood in hospital having operations on his spine – he had spinabifida.

Carmello lived for his Adventure games, but most of all he loved your column in C&VG. He used to whizz down to the shops (in his wheelchair) to get his hands on the latest issue; but instead of reading the magazine, he would turn straight to your pages. He used to ask me to help him read the hints and tips you gave out. He REALLY did enjoy your column. Carmello kept on playing Adventure games to the point that his reading and writing improved. I remember the day that your column disappeared from C&VG. Carmello came round my house telling me that they must have made a mistake and that the column would appear in the next issue. It never did return.

Unfortunately, in 1991, Carmello died aged 22, but I have fond memories of his love for Adventure games and your column. So Keith, on behalf of Carmello, I would like to say a big THANK YOU for all the help and happiness you gave Carmello through your column. I hope you didn't mind me sharing that with you."

You did make me smile Vinny, but there were tears rolling down my cheeks at the same time, and Paul Drury as well, who I forwarded it to. Thank you for that lovely story.

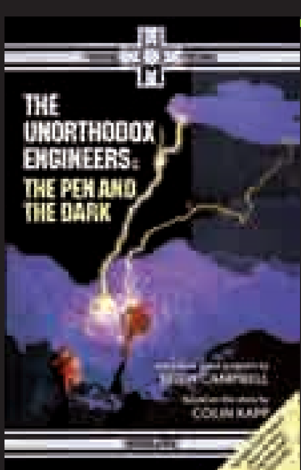
Keith Campbell, April 2005



» Keith and Anita Sinclair of *Magnetic Scrolls.*

CODING ADVENTURES

THE PEN AND THE DARK



» The success of *The Pen And The Dark* led to Keith planning, but never coding, a follow-up: *The Subways Of Tazoo.*

Though Keith is best remembered for his monthly adventure column in C&VG, he did code *The Pen And The Dark*, released by Mosaic Publishing in 1984. The founder of the company, Vicky Carne, remembers Keith fondly.

'Keith was a great chap who I thoroughly enjoyed working with and I am very sorry to hear the news. It was over 20 years ago that I met him when he offered to write a sci-fi adventure game for my new company, Mosaic Publishing, based on a short story from The Unorthodox Engineers, written by Colin Kapp. It was always a pleasure to see Keith and I'll never forget his presence looming over us all in the office as he discussed his latest project. He had tremendous enthusiasm for adventure games and on his ' Trash-80' he wrote a wonderful game that went on selling for many years.'

RETRO SCENE

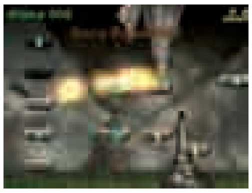
SNAKY JAKE SNEAKS INTO VIEW AND, UNCHALLENGED, EARNS ITSELF A RETRO GAMER SIZZLER

SNAKY JAKE

ATTEMPTING TO DO FOR SNAKES WHAT JAWS UNLEASHED DIDN'T DO FOR SHARKS

- » **FORMAT:** WINDOWS PC
- » **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** TONY OAKDEN
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** CHARLIEDOGGAMES
- » **LINK:** HTTP://CHARLIEDOGGAMES.COM/
- » **PRICE:** TBC
- » **REVIEWED BY:** MIKE TOOLEY





Snakes eh? Fascinating reptiles to some, the stuff of nightmares to others. Snakes have been irrevocably linked to some of man's most despicable deeds: the Aztecs usurped the Mayans by populating their lands with snakes, Cleopatra used a snake to end her life and it was a serpent that offered up the apple to Eve. If Samuel L Jackson is to be believed snakes are even receiving frequent flyer miles these days.

Undaunted Charlie Dog has offered snakes a chance of appeasement by introducing us to Jake the snake.

Instantly endearing from the outset Jake is the kind of snake you wouldn't mind taking home to meet mum – providing of course that she doesn't have a phobia of Indiana Jones proportions.

The game isn't standard fare either and represents an innovative and refreshing take on platform-based puzzle games. Imagine if you will a side-scrolling point-and-click platform game, with puzzle overtones and you won't be far from the reality of *Snaky Jake*.

There are two main elements to the game: Story Mode and Action Game. The Story Mode impresses immediately, guiding the player through the early levels without the stop start interruptions of most modern tutorials. With an impeccable learning curve the player is soon moving Jake fluidly around the jungle environment.

The game scrolls left to right, and if Jake is caught as the screen scrolls, he dies. Platforms light up to show Jake the way, Jake follows his fairy so directions are achieved by moving the fairy and pressing the left mouse button. As familiarity grows new elements are introduced, fruit can be collected and chained together for bonus points. This fruit then forms a tail behind Jake – if this gets caught as the screen scrolls Jake loses his shield and so it goes on. Think fast and act quicker are most definitely the watch words of *Snaky Jake* and there is very little linearity about the whole process. As the story unfolds quests are allocated – successful completion of a quest rewards Jake with new skills, like attack moves.

The action game is more of the same but with the story elements dropped from proceedings. Slightly spiked in terms of difficulty there is a massive challenge to be had here. Innovation entrenches the game throughout, with a control mechanic that is robust enough for audacious platform antics, accurate enough for precision actions and simple enough for a child to use – not since Link's auto jump has character control seen such a revolution.

Conquering the game will take some time, as it is absolutely huge. Multiple routes help and the game saves after every level, creating a nice pick up and play mechanic. Another nice feature that stands out amongst the abundance of features is the way that Jake starts from his point of death with his next life. Gone is the need to replay already completed segments of the game. Challenging without being frustrating there is more than enough here to keep anyone playing for a long time.

Snakey Jake is polished to an impossible sheen: the graphics radiate warmth that brings a glow to each scenario, wrapping themselves lovingly around Jakes antics, and it all serves to heighten the experience. Sound is a fusion of acid jazz that creates a funky sound while perpetuating itself as pace-maker for the game as well as acting as an aural muse for the cartoonist sound effects that pepper each level.



» That bloody Eve has eaten all the apples again.

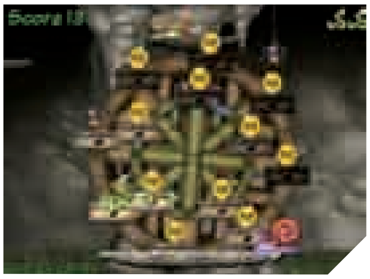
Snaky Jake works on so many levels and fails on none. Somehow *Snaky Jake* reawakens the heart that brought us to gaming in the first place – it holds true to all that is good about retro, whilst introducing a fresh approach.

This game is every bit as significant to Indy game development as *Jaws* was to Mr Spielberg once upon a time. Moreover this feels so totally new that it transcends personal preference. If Tony Oakden had thought of this in the late Eighties when he burst onto the gaming scene, Yuji and Shiggsy would have found the Nineties a much less forgiving decade. Tony Oakden should be very proud of himself.

RATING **95%**



» This game is full if choices, should Jake finish or increase his fruit bonus?





» The pointed star a the top reflects Jakes skill set, at this point the has one skill, bouncing on baddies.

BARGAIN HUNT

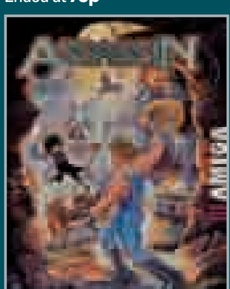
HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japan auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over 100 different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it!

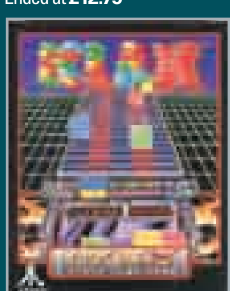
RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. If something has sold for a staggeringly high amount of money (or lower than it normally would) you'll find them listed here.

ASSASSIN
AMIGA
Normally sells for **£3+**
Ended at **75p**



KLAX
LYNX
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£12.75**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**

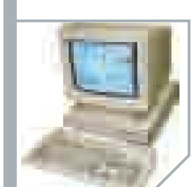


PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**

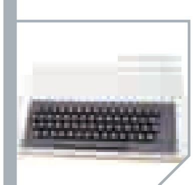


PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released!
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

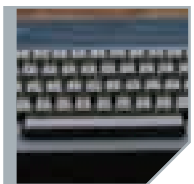
ACORN



ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (with games)**
Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor!



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**
Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- RENEGADE
- RICK DANGEROUS
- GRYZOR



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE

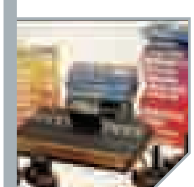


APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) (with games)**
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built machine and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+**
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

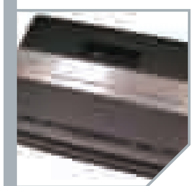
RARITY GUIDE

- ROCKING HORSE SHIT
- HEN'S TEETH
- LUCKY FIND
- EBAY REGULAR
- CAR BOOT SALE BARGAIN



5200

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



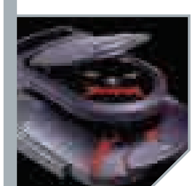
7800

» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD



LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)

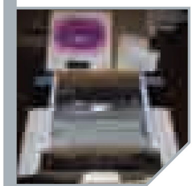
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

BANDAI



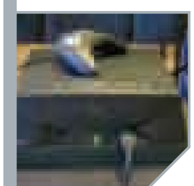
GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) (prices fluctuate wildly)**
Ultra rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



PIPPIN(ATMARK)

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. It's high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL

» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA500/600/1200

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) (more with games, depending on model)**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore, that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models, with differing specs, the Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4

» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the best selling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND



C128

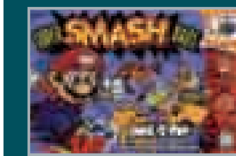
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.



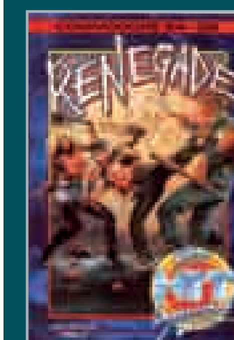
CDTV

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

SUPER SMASH BROS
N64
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£37.01**



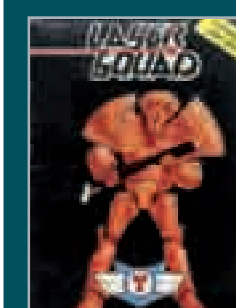
RENEGADE
C64
Normally sells for **£1**
Ended at **no sale**



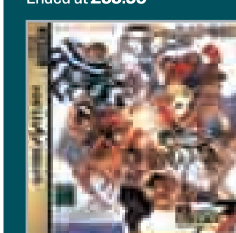
METROPOLIS STREET RACER
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£1.23**



LASER SQUAD
Normally sells for **£1**
Ended at **£7.51**



STREET FIGHTER ZERO 3
Normally sells for **£60+**
Ended at **£33.95**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.

CD32



» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.

- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D

VIC-20



» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**

The computer that established Commodore brand.

- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU

FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS



» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**

Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.

FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY



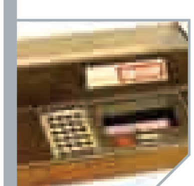
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**

A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive, (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!

- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS

BALLY ASTROCADE



» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.

- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE

BARCODE BATTLER



» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**

Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…

– Kelloggs Cornflakes (500g)
– Shredded Wheat 18's
– Weetabix 72's

CASIO LOOPY



» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

More inanity from the land of the rising sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio hoped it would do better than their failed PV-1000 console released in 1983.

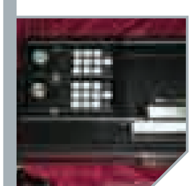
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F



» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (from the USA)**

The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).

COLECOVISION

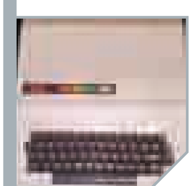


» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**

Coleco's third generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.

-CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS

DRAGON 32/64



» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) (very cheap on eBay)**

Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.

- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER

ARCADIA 2001



» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Failed console by Emerson, which had numerous different clones released as well.

- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER

EPOCH CASSETTE VISION



» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.

EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION



» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**

Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, which was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.

INTELLIVISION



» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**

Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.

- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE

ODYSSEY



» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act! Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.

ORIC-1



» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products Internation. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.

- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT

PLAYSTATION



» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**

Another attempt by Sony to enter the videogame hardware market (after the MSX), this time they took over the market. There are countless undocumented yet excellent PS games. Was later re-released as the PSOne, which is more expensive, but looks much nicer in design.

- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER

SAM COUPE



» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) (allegedly for a mint system)**

Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupe was a unique 8-bit British home computer which didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.

- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA

SUPERVISION



» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.

TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM



» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.

- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D

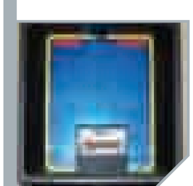
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)



» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Series of old computers by Tomy.

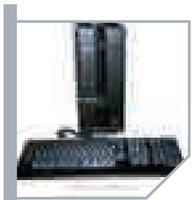
VECTREX (MB/GCE)



» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**

The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.

- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE

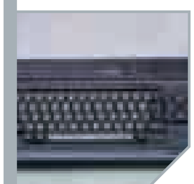


X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

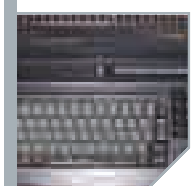
MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent homebrew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER



MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

NEC



PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



PC-ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two system's Hu-Cards are not mutually compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) (massive fluctuations)**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- BLOODY WOLF
- NINJA SPIRIT



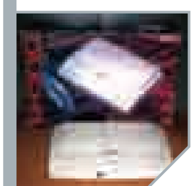
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) (prices can fluctuate)**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had 6 games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PCE CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PCE and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PCE DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PCE/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.

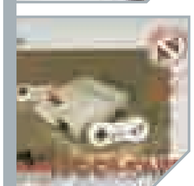


DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped down white version of the PCE Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a 6 button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over a 1000 games to choose from!



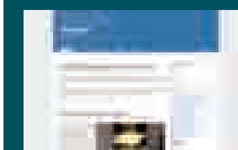
FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.



FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned,

RETRO GAMING SITES

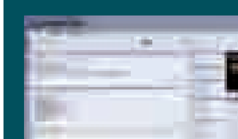
SHORYUKEN
Love beat-'em-ups? Then you're going to love Shoryuken. Featuring in-depth articles and juicy tips, Shoryuken is a fighting fans dream. Special mention must go to the forum, which features an in-depth look at the creation of *Street Fighter The Movie* by one of its developers.
www.shoryuken.com



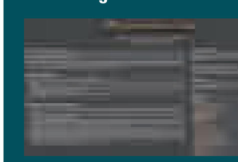
COMMODORE16.COM
We were walking home from work, when a bag was thrown over our heads and we were bundled into the back of a truck. Two hours later with bags still over our heads, we were tickled until we agreed to feature Commodore16.com in the magazine. So here it is.
www.commodore16.com



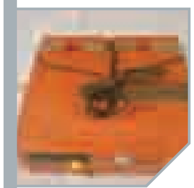
REMIX64.COM
If you're one of those 8-bit computer owners that felt only the C64 could make decent music then tune into this website. Filled with an array of remixes for both the C64 and the Amiga, Remix64 is a genuine delight for the ears.
www.remix64.com



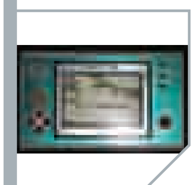
DUNGEON MASTER.COM
If you enjoyed last month's Making of Dungeon Master but crave more, then you may be interested to know that all your needs can be fulfilled at Dungeon Master.com. Its members are passionate and very friendly. so go and say hi.
www.dungeonmaster.com



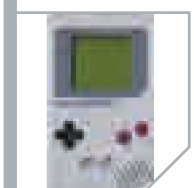
the drive belts break very easily.



SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



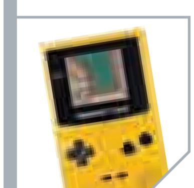
GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yoko.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite it's age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact GB, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic GB. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
» » RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of their cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72 pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of their most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JPN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



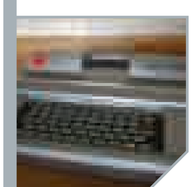
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips.The 200 series consists of front loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (more with DVC)**
Consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000, that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



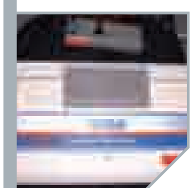
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance it's capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- CRAZY TAXI
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. Could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history! The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc.**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (according to eBay)**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
» » RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer

hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» » PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.

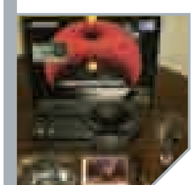


GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**
CDX/Xeye
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (more with games)**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook style boxes.

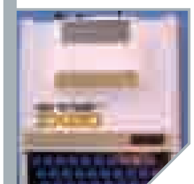
- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR. AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse, that despite an amazing catalogue of games never really took off.

- SATURN BOMBERMAN
- GUARDIAN HEROES
- DRAGON FORCE

SINCLAIR

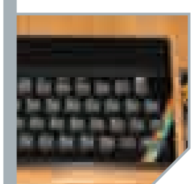


ZX-80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) Apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX-81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX-80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
-SABOTAGE



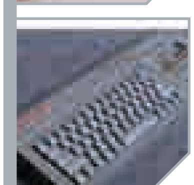
ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



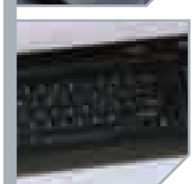
ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, it was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK



NEOGEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
High powered home system by SNK. Features many high quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEOGEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) (multi-slot systems cost more)**
High powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of NeoGeo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted).

- METAL SLUG
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- WAKU WAKU 7

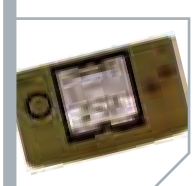


NEOGEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**



NEOGEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**
CD-based NeoGeo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of NeoGeo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has slightly improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHOWDOWN RPG



NEOGEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

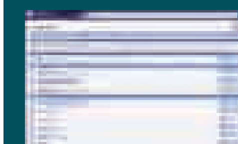


NEOGEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Handheld NeoGeo systems by SNK, that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

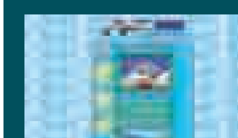
- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

RETRO GAMING SITES

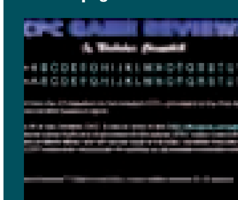
ENGLISH AMIGA BOARD
While we've featured a fair few other Amiga-related websites in Retro Gamer, this is the first time that we've mentioned this forum. Virtually every aspect of the Amiga scene is covered, from home-brew to trading and the friendly atmosphere means you'll never want to leave.
http://eab.abime.net/index.php



OUTRUN.ORG
Stuart Campbell isn't all that keen on it, but the original *OutRun* remains one of Retro Gamer's very favourite arcade racers. This rather lovely tribute site features everything from reviews of each home conversion, to MP3s and a host of other goodies – even if it hasn't had an update since the beginning of 2006.
www.outrun.org



CPC GAME REVIEWS
All praise to Nicholas Campbell. He's filled his fantastic site with hundreds upon hundreds of CPC reviews. This is the definitive collection of CPC reviews on the internet. What's more, it's even possible to download certain games for your own pleasure (providing that you own them of course). Amstrad owners should definitely check this site out as it may be able to fulfil all of your Amstrad desires.
www.cpcgamereviews.co.uk



Special thanks to **lofi-gaming-org.uk** who supplied several of our screenshots

NEXT ISSUE

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THE BIG READER VOTE

THE VOTES ARE IN, THEY'VE BEEN COUNTED, DROPPED AND COUNTED AGAIN, BUT WE'VE FINALLY ARRIVED AT SOME FIGURES THAT EVERYONE CAN AGREE ON. FIND OUT THE WINNERS NEXT ISSUE WHEN PROGRAMMERS PAST AND PRESENT DISCUSS YOUR FAVOURITE PLATFORMERS OF ALL TIME.

OTHER EXCITING FEATURES…

- Stuart Campbell attempts to unravel the convoluted *Wonderboy* franchise.
- Conversion king, Ste Ruddy discusses his favourite Desert Island Disks and answers questions from Retro Gamer readers.
- Discover the creation of one of the greatest arcade scrolling fighters of all time – Capcom's *Final Fight.*
- David Crane talks about *PitFall II: Lost Caverns.*



SPLATTERHOUSE

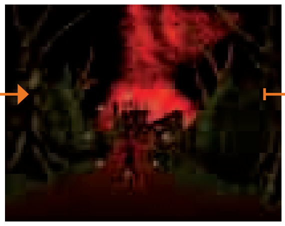
Silly Rick. As part of a school project he's headed into the haunted Splatterhouse with his girlfriend, Jennifer, and predictably she's been kidnapped by evil forces. Rick dons a possessed mask and heads off in hot pursuit. Silly Rick.



SCREEN 1
Doing a wicked impression of Jason from *Friday The 13th*, Rick decides to fight through some of the ugliest monstrosities to feature in an arcade game. Approaching the final boss, Rick wades in with his banana-sized fists.



SCREEN 2
The Terror Mask is obviously a relic of great power as it allows the hulking teenage to rip his ungodly opponent to shreds. As the huge mayor returns to whatever hell spawned it, Rick looks frantically for Jennifer. Is she dead?



SCREEN 3
With no Jennifer in sight a dejected Rick walks away from the haunted house (which begins to crumble *Poltergeist*–style) and wonders how the hell he's going to be accepted back in school with a hockey mask on his head.



SCREEN 4
But what's this? It would appear that the Terror Mask has it's own ideas, and after separating itself from Rick's face it shatters into several pieces. With the broken mask in ruins it would appear that Rick is free to lead a normal life.



SCREEN 5
Just like those old B-movies where a solitary killer bee survives Michael Cain's attempt to kill the Swarm, the Terror Mask reforms into a perfect whole again. It would appear that Rick's demonic work is far from over…